> He sat with the rigidity of a corpse, stood with the stiffness of a tree, moved swift as lightning and walked like a whirlwind . . . there seemed to be no book he had not read . . . To him life and death seemed a succession as inevitable as cold and heat, and neither of them occupied in his heart so much as the space of a mustard-seed or spike of grass.[16]

Intrigued by all he had heard about the sage, in May 1219 Genghis issued a 'request' that Chang Chun should visit him and impart his wisdom. The long letter contained the following:

> Heaven has grown weary of the excessive pride and extravagant luxury in China and has abandoned her . . . But I, living in the barbaric north in the wilderness, have no inordinate passions . . . I wear the same clothes and eat the same food as the cowherds and horseherders. We make the same sacrifices and we share the same riches. I look upon the nation as a newborn child and I care for my soldiers as if they were my brothers . . . Do not think of the extent of the sandy desert . . . Have pity upon me and communicate to me the means of preserving life.[17]

Since Chang was in Shandong province, then controlled by the Mongols, refusal was not really an option but, always a complainer and a prima donna, he protested at the length of time – at least three years – he would have to be absent from his disciples and showed his refusal (in his own mind at least) to truckle by insisting on lengthy breaks and stopovers on his journey. He agreed initially to visit Genghis on the assumption he was in Mongolia but became alarmed when he realised he was committed to an arduous journey all the way to the Hindu Kush. He salved his wounded pride and *amour propre* by a typically self-regarding letter in April 1220, grudgingly accepting the necessity for extensive travelling but underlining the message that he was paying Genghis a very special favour; he pointed out that he had had an invitation from the Song emperor but had declined to go and was obeying the Mongol khan's summons only because it was obvious that he was Heaven's chosen one.[18]

Chang started the way he meant to go on, taking from February to May to complete the journey to Peking (including lengthy stops in Chi-yang and Peking itself); this was the beginning of a four-year odyssey

that would last from February 1220 to January 1224. When Liu Wen finally prised him out of the Heavenly City, Chang was surly, continually complaining about the length of the journey that lay ahead and looking around for excuses to halt. Finally, he found what he thought was the perfect excuse. Accompanying his caravan was a bevy of harem girls bound for Genghis's seraglio. Chung protested vociferously to Liu Wen that this was an insult, that having such girls in his party would besmirch the sanctity of his office.[19] The plan worked. Once the party reached the city of Te-Hsing in midwinter, Chang refused to go on until Liu Wen had clarified the situation with Genghis. Naturally the dispatch of messages between northern China and north-west India took time, so that in the end Chang was able to parlay his stay until March 1221. Some despots would have been angry at such obvious stalling, but Genghis bent over backwards to be accommodating. The odalisques were sent on by separate caravan so as not to 'pollute' the sage, and Genghis sent a most flattering letter, almost as though Chang were the powerful one and he the suppliant. Insisting that Chang must proceed, Genghis laid it on with a trowel, praising Chang as a perfect master superior in wisdom even to the founders of Taoism:

> Now that your cloud-girt chariot has issued from Fairyland, the cranes that draw it will carry you pleasantly through the realms of India. Bodidharma, when he came to the East, by spiritual communication revealed the imprint in his heart: Lao Tzu, when he travelled in the West, perfected his Tao by converting Central Asia. The way before you, both by land and water, is indeed long; but I trust the comforts I shall provide will not make it seem long.[20]

The journey turned out even longer than Genghis had expected. It was recorded in detail by Chang's disciple Sun Hsi and remains a treasure trove for social historians of the Mongol empire.

Once word spread about Genghis's besotment with the Chinese sage, all influential Mongols wanted to get in on the act. His brother Temuge sent a message demanding that Chang visit him too in the Mongolian heartland, and this would necessitate a massive diversion north into Mongolia before striking south-west for India. Chang protested about this as well, and Liu Wen tried to intercede with Temuge, but Genghis's brother was adamant. There was nothing for it then but a gruelling trek north across the Gobi in winter, when the desert was an arctic landscape with thick snow and ice.[21]

It was 24 April 1221 before Chang's party reached Temuge's encampment on the River Kerulen. Temuge tried to show who was boss by refusing to receive Chang until six days of a wedding feast had elapsed, then on the seventh interviewed him and brusquely demanded to know the secrets of immortality. Chang stalled, saying he needed a period of meditation first but, when Temuge persisted, came up with the novel argument that it would be improper to reveal his secrets to anyone before he had divulged them to the khan himself. Temuge was forced to acquiesce and, thinking forward to the report Chang was likely to make to Genghis, provided the sage with a lavish farewell gift of ten wagons and hundreds more horses and oxen.[22]

On 10 May Chang moved on again, striking south-west along the Kerulen, past Lake Buir and the scene of a great victory over the Merkit. Chang was delighted to record an eclipse of the sun on 23 May and soon they began to see the looming peaks of the great mountains ahead. There followed a series of mountainous ascents and river crossings with some of the streams in stormy spate. The next stop was at the *ordo* (palace) of one of Genghis's wives, where they were royally entertained.[23] Setting out again on 29 July, they endured many gruelling days in snow-capped mountains before passing close to the famous city of craftsmen that Chinqai had built. This was Chinqai Balasaqun, a.k.a. the 'Black City', situated halfway between Genghis's base camp in Mongolia and the area of later operations in Turkestan (north of modern Zhanjiakou/Kalgan). Primarily an agricultural colony, it was composed of artisans, farmers and captured foreign craftsmen. The Chinese artisans, who knew all about Chang, went out to meet him and crowned him with garlands of flowers.[24]

Chang saw the chance for another long stopover and suggested it, but Liu Wen impressed on him that he had explicit instructions from Genghis Khan to allow no further delays. Chinqai, who was there in person, confirmed these instructions but, to show goodwill, offered to accompany Chang on the rest of his journey; the charmless sage simply shrugged and said that whatever happened was *karma*. To save face he left behind his chief disciple and eight monks to spend the winter there and build a monastery. Chinqai, an administrative genius, was a valuable addition to the party. He cut down on the baggage and impedimenta weighing down the wagons, explaining that there were many high mountains and treacherous swamps ahead.[25]

On 26 August the party set out again – Chang, ten monks, Liu Wen, Chinqai and about one hundred Mongol cavalrymen. As Chinqai had predicted the going was strenuous and gruelling, and they had a hard time threading through defiles in the Altai Mountains. On good days they followed a crude military road that Ogodei had built, but on bad days they had to drag wagons up the slopes of mountains with ropes tied to the wagon shafts, then lock the wheels and lower them gingerly down the far side. In this way they negotiated five mountain ranges and emerged on the River Ulungur on the southern side.[26] Although they had reached the other side of the mountains, Chinqai informed them that the worst was yet to come, as they had to cross salt flats and deserts, the first of them with abundant grass and water, but then an arid stretch whose extent was unknown. By now the heat was so intense that they travelled by night and rested by day. They were wearied by crossing innumerable sandhills: 'our progress was like that of a ship climbing continually over the crest of huge waves.'[27] Oxen proved useless in the desert, so Chinqai hitched them to the wagons and used horses. Chang was amused by the fearful demeanour of the Mongols as they travelled by night, forever looking over their shoulders for demons; contemptuously he informed them that demons always fled from honest men.

Finally, on 15 September the party reached the foot of the T'ien Shan, where towns started to appear. After a four day stay at Beshbaliq, they pressed on through Chambaliq, west along the T'ien Shan, now travelling from dawn to dusk in intense cold but mercifully downhill, past Lake Sayram (with snow-capped peaks reflected in its waters) and finally to Almaliq, which had the distinction of having a Muslim governor who was formerly a highwayman.[28] They were now in fertile country, abounding in orchards and fields of cotton and watermelons. On 18 October they endured a perilous crossing of the deep, wide and swift-flowing River Ili, trekked for twelve days through heavy snow south of Lake Issyk and came at last to Balasagun, once the capital of the now defunct Qara Khitai. On the way they were able to admire the road Chagatai had built with its forty-eight timber bridges, wide enough to take two heavy carts abreast.[29]

Next they followed the lines of the mountains west for eight days, passed through red-stoned Taraz and Sayram in heavy rainfall and reached Tashkent on 22 November. Then it was on to Banakat and the crossing of the Syr Darya on a floating bridge, through the last range of mountains and then the Zarafshan valley and at last to Samarkand on 3 December, where they were greeted by enthusiastic crowds. Hearing that the roads to the Hindu Kush were impassable because of roadblocks set up by bandits and guerrillas, Liu Wen suggested to a mightily relieved Chang Chun that the meeting with Genghis be deferred to spring.[30]

Following its sack by Genghis two years before, Samarkand had declined from its former glory to a little town of some 25,000 inhabitants. Chang was lodged in the shah's palace over the protests of the governor, who warned him that this location was not safe because of local brigandage. Chang's reply was typically arrogant: 'No man can defy Fate. Moreover Good and Evil go their own way without harming one another.'[31] Ignoring the ingratitude, governor Yelu Ahai (older brother of Yelu Tuka, the distinguished general who had served under Muqali in China) took the prickly sage under his wing. Yelu Ahai, now a man aged around 70, had plenty of experience of prima donnas and disregarded Chang's behaviour.[32] Instead, he sent him ten pieces of brocade which, predictably, Chang sent back on the grounds that he was not interested in luxury. Yelu tried again and sent one hundred pounds of grapes. The charmless Chang declared that he was not interested in the fruit for himself but would keep them for his guests. Nevertheless, he did accept a monthly allowance of rice, corn, salt and oil. The governor, a Khitan born to an oligarchic Chinese family, probably plumbed the depths of Chang's secret insecurity but knew only too well that favour and advancement depended on keeping sweet this suprising object of the khan's affection. As a Nestorian Christian, he would have had little time for Chang's nostrums.

Another Khitan seriously alienated by Chang Chun during his long stay in Samarkand was the top bureaucrat Yelu Chu Cai, later to be Ogodei's key government official in China and a relative of the governor.[33] Yelu had known Chang only by hearsay but recommended him on the basis of his promising advocacy of religious syncretism. He was disposed to be friendly towards him as he was starved of intellectual company in Samarkand, but the first meetings with him brought severe disillusionment. It transpired that Chang had no interest in using his influence to bring Genghis round to a less savage way of governing his empire, but was concerned only to convert the khan to his own narrow and blinkered version of alchemical Taoism. Conversation with Chang moreover revealed the sage's utter and total ignorance of Buddhism, which did not prevent him from uttering ex cathedra remarks about that religion. Moreover, Yelu, who knew Chinese history backwards, caught Chang out in an elementary lie. Chang claimed that the Jin emperor Shih-Tsung, whom he had met in 1188, had followed his advice and prescriptions and completely recovered his physical strength, but Yelu knew very well that, far from recovering, the emperor had died in the same year. It did not take Yelu long to conclude that Chang was an unregenerate charlatan, but he had to tread carefully because of Genghis's intellectual love affair with him. Therefore, Yelu commented, 'I behaved politely in his presence, but in my mind I thought little of him.'[34] When asked if he would compose a verse eulogy on Chang, Yelu maintained a scornful silence, but those who knew his secret thoughts were convulsed with amusement at such an idea. To add insult to injury, Chang's disciples suggested that he become a lay disciple of their master. Relaying this to Yelu Ahai the governor, Yelu Chu Cai remarked with some bitterness: 'In my youth I practised Confucianism; when I grew older I embraced Buddhism. Why should I descend from lofty trees to enter into a dark valley?'[35]

Chang Chun passed the winter of 1221–22 in Samarkand in the kind of eremitic solitude he so prized. His only recorded activity was a discussion with a local astrologer about the eclipse of the sun he had seen on the Kerulen River. Liu Wen and his horsemen had meanwhile been reconnoitring the roads to the Hindu Kush, and returned in mid-February 1222 with the news that Chagatai and his cohorts had repaired all the damaged roads, boats and bridges ahead of them. But it was the end of March before a definite missive arrived from Genghis to say that he was ready to see Chang; a subsidiary message was sent to Liu Wen to tell him that his reward for getting the Chinese master all the way to the Hindu Kush would be a gift of ultra-fertile lands.[36] Chagatai also requested that Chang pay him a call but the sage declined, on the eccentric grounds that there were no vegetables or rice south of the Amu Darya.

The almond trees for which Samarkand was famous were already blooming when the party set out anew. Chinqai was in the party, as was governor Yelu Ahai, who was to act as interpreter at the interview. The importance Genghis attached to this became clear when he dispatched his favourite Bo'orchu with an elite bodyguard to escort Chang's cavalcade through the difficult pass between Qarshi and Termez. Departing on 28 April, they met Bo'orchu at Karshi, spent two days negotiating a high pass in the mountains, then followed a river south to the Amu Darya, which they crossed seven days later. Bo'orchu was forced to divert in the final stages to deal with bandits, but Chang and his acolytes finally reached Genghis's camp at Parwan, north of Kabul, on 15 May 1222.[37]

Chang presented himself at once to Genghis, who showered him with praise; he knew that other rulers such as the Song emperor had been turned down (he said), so he took the epic journey Chang had made to see him as the highest possible compliment.[38] Chang's reply – that it was the will of Heaven – delighted the khan. Overeager, Genghis at once asked for the elixir of life. Chang replied that he had some ways of ensuring longevity but no elixir for that purpose, and still less one that could secure immortality or the life span of a Methuselah. Pleased – or so he said – by this frankness, Genghis ordered a special tent to be erected for Chang to the east of his own. He then consulted with Chinqai on the best way to address his guest and finally settled on 'Holy Spirit', the Mongol equivalent of the Christian Holy Ghost, conceived as an ethereal being destined to ascend to Heaven, either as a bird or on a bird's back.[39]

Genghis ringed 24 June on his calendar as the day he would question Chang about 'the Way'.

However, hot weather soon pushed Genghis and his guests farther up the mountains, and a serious outbreak of guerrilla activity forced Genghis into the field, which meant he had to postpone the interview until 5 November.[40]

Since there was now a four-month gap until the meeting, Chang asked if he could return to the greater comfort of Samarkand. Genghis pointed out that the round trip would be strenuous but in the end reluctantly agreed. Chang departed on 27 May and was back in Samarkand on 15 June, where he was finally obliged to grant an interview to Chagatai. Three months later, on 13 September, he left on the return journey, this time following a slightly different route past the

ruins of Balkh.[41] He arrived at Genghis's camp on 28 September, complained about food shortages in Samarkand, was at once invited to take all his meals with the khan but declined, saying 'I am a mountain man and am only at my ease in quiet places.' It is doubtful if Genghis would have taken such impertinence from any other person in the world, but he acceded and sent his guest gifts of wine, grapes, fruit and vegetables. However, he decided that the original date of 5 November was too far in the future and brought the interview forward to 1 October.[42]

When the day came, six people were present: Genghis, Chinqai, Liu Wen, Chang, Yelu Ahai (who transcribed the sage's words into Mongolian) and an official interpreter. The meeting was considered a great success, with Genghis loud and affirmative in his praise of Chang, so further 'seminars' were arranged on 25 and 29 October.[43]

Chang's formal lecture contained six main themes. First, the Tao is the origin of all things – the Earth, Sun, Moon, even Heaven; but to know the greatness of Heaven is not to know the greatness of Tao.[44] Secondly, Man is a secondary manifestation – a product of Heaven and Earth, which were in themselves a product of the Tao. Thirdly, he introduced the somewhat confusing quasi-Manichean idea that primitive man had lost the 'holy Light'[45] – confusing in that he elsewhere extolled primitive man. Fourthly, in a clear echo of Stoic philosophy, he declared that all sensuous and sensual pleasure must be rejected. Fifthly, he preached that the two elements of Yang (fire, male) and Yin (water, female) interpenetrated in a greater Whole. Finally, there was the message that perfection consisted in nurturing that part of human nature which belonged to Heaven and rejecting the part that belongs to Earth, including sexual activity, hunting, drinking, gambling, et cetera, et cetera. For this 'wisdom' Genghis gave Chang the title Spirit Immortal and appointed him religious supremo in the entire Mongol empire.[46]

Yet one wonders what Genghis secretly made of all of this. If Chang was preaching that a pauper with just one wife could ruin himself by sexual indulgence, what then must be the fate of a great khan with access to thousands of women and whose palaces were filled with nubile females? Chang urged Genghis to sleep alone for a month: 'To take medicine for a thousand days does less good than to lie alone for a single night.' But Genghis protested that he was too old a dog to learn new tricks. Similarly, when Genghis was out hunting boar soon afterwards and was injured when his horse slipped, Chang advised him to give up hunting and to take more care since life was a precious gift. Genghis replied that he could not abandon a traditional pursuit so embedded in Mongol culture and, were he to do so, he would lose credibility with his men. But, out of deference to Chang, he did not go hunting again for another two months.[47]

On 5 November Genghis accompanied Chang back to Samarkand, where he was lodged in his own quarters. Genghis wanted to keep Chang at his side indefinitely, but Chang was desperate to get back to China. A tug-of-war developed, with Chang nagging to be allowed to depart, and Genghis stalling, always promising to let him go soon. Soon Genghis moved on north from Samarkand and insisted that Chang accompany him. Chang began his war of attrition by claiming that the noise and bustle of the caravan was too much for him, and asked permission to travel with a small escort well in the rear of the main convoy. Whether out of genuine concern or because he was determined to win the battle of wills, Genghis agreed.

On the journey, Chang availed himself of the chance to see fauna very different from that in China, including the Central Asian tiger, common in these parts right through to the nineteenth century.[48] But he was put through an elemental wringer. The party left Samarkand on 30 December but in January they were assailed by horrendous snowstorms. They just managed the crossing of the Syr Darya before a terrible storm destroyed the bridge of boats.[49] Genghis made the mistake of asking his unwilling guest what caused natural calamities like storms and earthquakes. Chang, aiming straight at the jugular of traditional folkways, replied that the way to avoid the wrath of heaven was to give up silly taboos about water and forbidding bathing. Warming to his theme, he told Genghis that of 3,000 different sins the worst was the ill-treatment of parents, and he had seen too much of this among the Mongols. He seemed almost to be provoking Genghis to dismiss him, but the khan would not rise to the bait. Cleverly, he turned Chang's flank by saying he completely agreed, ordered this wisdom recorded in Uighur script and told him he would add the recommendation to the Yasa. Meanwhile Genghis continually dinned it into his sons' ears that Chang was a being sent from Heaven and they should revere him accordingly.[50] The battle of wills continued

On 9 March 1223 Chang told Genghis that he *must* now depart as he had promised his disciples he would be back in China within three years. Genghis turned this by saying he also was travelling east so why should they not go together? Chang protested that he wanted to go at his own pace and begged to be released. Genghis insisted that Chang stay with him until all his sons, legitimate and natural, were gathered in one place so that they could learn the wisdom of the Tao.

At last, in mid-April, Genghis finally tired of the game of cat and mouse and told Chang he could leave.[51] As a parting gift Genghis made the unwise decision to exempt Chang and his sect from all taxes and compulsory labour and to appoint him director of religious affairs in China.[52] He offered Chang and his monks extra oxen for the homeward journey but the faux-ascetic Chang replied that the only animals he required were posthorses. Genghis sent a senior Mongol official with him to make straight the ways. In contrast to his sluggish, snail-like outward progress, when he claimed he needed frequent and lengthy rests and stopovers, the unleashed Chang moved like a swift arrow. Travelling rapidly via the Ili River, Lake Sayram and Almaliq, thence across snowy mountains and arid deserts to the Tangut territory, he and his party shot across country during the summer to the borders of Shanxi province, greeted everywhere by enthusiastic crowds, making hundreds of converts and generally enjoying a triumphal passage. Whenever he was asked to pause on the journey to preach or visit communities to provide pastoral or spiritual guidance, he declined, on the grounds that his rapid onward passage was *karma* and that Fate would not allow him to tarry.[53] He arrived at Peking in January 1224.

The sequel shows how one-sided the relationship had always been. On 3 July 1224 another message issued from Genghis that comes close to meriting the epithet 'pathetic': 'Since you went away, I have not once forgotten you for a single day. I hope you do not forget me . . . I wish your disciples to recite the scriptures continually on my behalf and to pray for my longevity.' The rest of the letter was full of pious hopes that on his return journey Chang had been working hard to reconcile the people he met to Mongol rule. He ended by telling the sage he was welcome to live anywhere he liked in the Mongol empire, with all bills to be sent to the khan.[54] The reality is that in his headlong race back to Peking Chang did not lift a finger on Genghis's behalf. Nor is there any record that he ever replied to this letter.

Naturally Genghis's confidants put a favourable 'spin' on the entire affair. Liu Wen wrote: 'From the moment the Adept came into the Khan's presence, it was clear that as sovereign and subject they fitted one another perfectly. After they parted, the khan felt the greatest affection for him and never showed any signs of forgetting him.'[55] Chang was concerned not to promote the Mongol empire but to secure privileges for China and, in particular, for his own sect. He actually had the effrontery to suggest that the whole of Jin China be exempt from taxation for three years but this was a bridge too far even for the besotted Genghis.[56]

He did, however, make the generous provision that all religions be exempt from taxes and *corvée* – this to apply only to existing monasteries so as to prevent the emergence of tax-dodgers masquerading as converts. Foolishly he allowed Chang to write the manifesto and affixed the imperial seal to the document without reading it. Yelu Chu Cai, who was away at the time, and would otherwise have examined the decree searchingly, was very angry when he realised that Chang, instead of writing that *all* religions should be so exempt, wrote that only his followers should enjoy the exemption.[57] Chang and his acolytes then used the decree they had essentially forged to appropriate Buddhist and Confucian temples in lieu of tax and began persecuting rival sects under the pretext of 'pacifying' them on Genghis's behalf. When Yelu eventually returned to China in 1227 (the year of Chang's death) he found that there had been a mass 'conversion' to Quanzhen Taoism by people wishing to avoid taxation and that this provision, which Genghis had specifically excluded in the decree issued to Chang, had been waived by Chang in his capacity as director of spiritual affairs for the empire. Genghis's noble attempt to introduce religious toleration throughout his realm had ended in fiasco.[58]

There was in fact no real rapport between the khan and the 'Adept'. As the French say, in every affair there is always '*celui qui baise et l'autre qui tend la joue*' and Genghis in this case was definitely the one doing the kissing. At another level one can see the Genghis–Chang story as yet another unwise attempt at convergence between a thinker and a temporal ruler, alongside Plato and Dionysius of Syracuse, or Voltaire and Frederick the Great.

After parting from Chang, Genghis spent some time in Tashkent, then headed north and spent the summer of 1223 on the Qulan Bashi steppe north of the Kirghiz Mountains.[59] By the spring of 1224 he had reached the Emil River, where he was met by his grandsons, the sons of Tolui: Qubilai (later emperor of China but then an 8-year-old boy) and Hulagu, his younger brother, aged 6. Qubilai had just killed his first big game and, following Mongol custom, his middle fingers were pricked so as to mix their blood with the meat – a kind of baptism of the chase.[60]

By summer 1224 Genghis arrived at Lake Zaysan and the Black Irtysh (Kara Irtysh), where he met Muqali's son Bol and his mother. Bol was one of the khan's favourites for, like Shigi Qutuqu, he was unusually receptive to new ideas. But on this occasion it was the mother, Yao-li Shih, that drew Genghis's attention. Having been previously married to the Khitan Yelu Liuke, who in turn had a son by a previous marriage, Yao-li Shih petitioned the khan that her stepson Hsieh-he be allowed to take up the post left vacant by his father.

Three things about this request appealed to Genghis. He was touched by the spectacle of a woman entering a plea for another woman's son; he had received a strong recommendation from Temuge for Hsieh; and he remembered that this was the man who had saved Jochi's life in 1216 at the battle of Kimach. Genghis expressed astonishment that the woman had travelled all the way from China on this sentimental quest and said to her: 'Not even an eagle or a sparrowhawk could reach here but you, a woman, have made it.'[61] He granted her petition with alacrity.

Meanwhile, hearing that even after Eljigidei's pacification campaign Khorasan and areas west were still in ferment, he sent Ogodei and Chagatai back there to deal harshly with the rebels. By this time Khwarezm proper and Transoxiana had bowed to the inevitability of Mongol rule but Afghanistan and especially Khorasan, with access to Iraq-Adjemi and the West, still seemed unreconciled. The son he would have chosen for this task, Tolui, was currently unavailable, having gone down with smallpox.[62] Jochi was still in a sulk in his northern eyrie but he did send a conciliatory gift of 20,000 horses and a huge herd of wild donkeys. To show his disapproval of Jochi's wayward behaviour, Genghis used the donkeys for target practice then, when he tired of his archers' slaughter, released the survivors into the wild; the horses he retained, for chargers were always much too valuable to be squandered in this mindless way.[63]

On his way home, Genghis made deliberately slow progress, holding many feasts and hunts to celebrate his great triumph in the war against the Khwarezmian empire. There was much to be pleased about, for his great favourite the *idiqut* Barchuq had distinguished himself at the siege of Nishapur, while every single objective in the war except for the pursuit of the shah had been achieved by Genghis himself or his sons. It was true that he had been very displeased with the lacklustre military performance of Jochi and Chagatai at Gurganj (Urgench), but all had turned out well in the end. He told his confidants that he was particularly pleased that he and his sons had managed everything so well, without having to turn to their three ace generals, Muqali, Jebe and Subedei.[64]

He arrived back in Mongolia in February 1225, having been absent at the war against the shah for six years. When his great friend Bo'orchu died later that year, he showered his family with gifts, favours and promotions, and he did the same for Muqali, who had died in 1223, but whose kin he had been unable to reward adequately because of his absence at the war.[65]

The year 1225 was spent taking stock. Genghis often reflected on the mixed legacy of his empire and his own ambivalence towards it. On the one hand he had given the Mongols wealth, power and luxury beyond their wildest dreams, and had turned an obscure tribe of nomads into the virtual rulers of the world; the people who had dressed in rags and eaten dogs and mice when he was a boy now took the most sumptuous luxury for granted. Genghis had authorised the use of paper money, backed by precious metals and silk, and used silver ingots to assess the amount of paper money issued so as to prevent runaway inflation.[66] Because of the vast numbers of artisans and craftsmen deported from China and Persia the Mongol empire had become a powerhouse of trade and technology.[67] (So unstoppable was this economic and commercial momentum that, for example, Gurganj, seemingly destroyed beyond any possibility of revival in 1221, had recovered in the 1230s to the point where it once again became an important trade centre.)[68]

Genghis took justifiable pride in the wealth his empire had accumulated, but he appreciated there were associated costs, the most important of which seemed to be the loss of the old Mongol ethos and culture. Integration with conquered, sedentary peoples, and especially the sinicisation of the Mongols in China threatened the old way

of life in exactly the ways the far-sighted Genghis had predicted. Genghis had wanted to 'mongolise' the rest of the world, but his policy of cohabitation produced the opposite effect, whereby it was the Mongols who were absorbed, thus proving that the cultures of a pastoral life and of urban, sedentary peoples were ultimately irreconcilable.[69]

But the very success of his imperial project brought other dangers too. The greatly improved Mongol diet, with such items as chickpeas, fenugreek seeds and spices such as cardamom added to the menu, brought undoubted benefits, but this was easily outweighed by the deleterious impact of new and more powerful alcoholic beverages.[70] Koumiss, the traditional recreational and festive drink, was no stronger than a very weak beer, but now the Mongols had access to much more powerful wines and other brews, whose alcohol content might be four times as much. The craze for strong drink became a really grave social problem in the last few years of Genghis's reign.[71] The worst offenders were the high Mongol aristocrats themselves. Ogodei and Tolui were serious topers while Jochi's son Batu had a permanent supply of fine wines provided by thirty riders stationed one day's ride from his camp. Even before he switched to European wines, Batu was a devotee of the superior, clear black koumiss, and it was calculated that it took the milking of 3,000 mares daily to satisfy Batu's household's needs.[72] Like the Romans, Mongols gloried in their ability to vomit up an excess of wine and spirits and start again. Severe alcoholism was the major reason for the short lifespans of the great Mongol khans and aristocrats. They rarely lived beyond fifty; only Genghis, who died at 65 and was a moderate drinker, and Qubilai Khan (who died at 78) bucked this trend.[73]

Increasingly Mongol society, previously relatively egalitarian, began to display the crevasses between richest and poorest which are commonplace in affluent societies. The inequality even extended into burial practices. When a rich man died, he was buried secretly in open country, being placed in a ger with a basket full of meat and a jar of koumiss. With him were buried a mare, a foal, a colt with bridle and saddle and a bow with quiver and arrows, along with gold and silver. His friends then ate the flesh of a horse, stuffed its hide with hay, and set it up on a wooden scaffold. A variant on these practices was to impale a horse on poles over the graves of the wealthy. A man was thought to need all these things on the Mongol 'ship of death' that took him to the afterlife.[75] Alternatively, the survivors pretended to bury the dead man openly and publicly near his ger but in reality interred him in a secret pit with a square opening in open country. The deceased's favourite slave was placed under the corpse in this open grave for three days. If the slave survived, he was immediately made a free man and treated forever as an honoured guest in the family. After this the open grave was covered, earthed over and trampled by horses and cattle so that no trace of the burial place remained. The ordinary Mongol, however, did not even enjoy the 'luxury' of a mass grave. The corpses of such people were simply dumped in remote, uninhabited parts of the steppes, in a kind of macabre human landfill. The practice continued until the nineteenth century, and one traveller from that era describes it thus:

> It would be impossible to imagine a more horrible spectacle than met our eyes on arriving at Golgotha, an open space or cleft between two green hillocks . . . a valley literally crammed with corpses in every stage of decomposition, from the bleached bones of skeletons that had lain there for years, to the disfigured, shapeless masses of flesh that had been living beings but a few days or hours ago. The moon shed a pale, unearthly light over the grinning skulls and grey upturned faces of the dead, some of whom lay stark and stiff, just as they had been left by their friends, others with their blue shrouds ragged and torn, with disfigured faces and twisted limbs, lying in the horribly grotesque positions in which the dogs or wolves had dragged them . . . The Mongol is, at any rate, free from an evil which always more or less threatens us of superior civilization – that of being buried alive.[76]

Amid the most indescribable stench wolves, dogs, vultures and other carrion birds fought each other for the human remains. But the Mongols rationalised all this through their beliefs in shamanism and animism. They reckoned that to deposit a corpse in the steppes enabled the deceased to perform a last virtuous act, since animals too were important in the world order. They argued that the prolonging of all life was a desirable goal, and that if vultures and wild dogs feasted off cadavers they would therefore not prey on other animals, which in turn would live longer.[77]

*Genghis's thoughts on his own death in the last two years of his life were not, however, focused on burial practices but on the likely fate of the Mongol empire when he was no more. By 1226 the alienation of Jochi had reached the point of acute crisis. Genghis had frequently batted away Chagatai's violent remonstrances about his hated elder brother, usually employing his favourite argument that, even if Jochi had been sired by a Merkit, he, Chagatai, Ogodei and Tolui had all emerged from the same womb. But Jochi's behaviour since Gurganj and, in particular, his potentially disastrous failure to protect the flank of Subedei and Jebe adequately on their perilous journey home in 1222–23, raised his behaviour to a different dimension. Juvaini additionaly claims that Genghis was obscurely jealous of Jochi for his leadership abilities, his wisdom and his abilities as a field commander (whatever his deficiency at sieges).[78]

Chagatai, eaten up with his insensate hatred of Jochi, seems to have sensed his father's change of mood and began a drip-drip of insinuation, propaganda and downright lies designed to compass the destruction of the detested one. His chance came when Genghis, tired of his son's insubordination, expressly summoned him to court. Jochi replied that he could not obey the summons as he was gravely ill – which turned out to be true.[79] But Chagatai saw a golden opportunity. He employed an agent provocateur to inform the khan that, far from being ill, Jochi had been seen out hunting, hale and healthy. Again Genghis sent the summons and again came the answer: Jochi was ill. This time Genghis sent out his most trusted envoys to ascertain the truth.[80] Meanwhile Chagatai played his trump card. He seems to have obtained a document, either genuine or forged, in which Jochi condemned his father in the most forthright terms. The letter claimed that it would have been easy for a real statesman to make a lasting peace with the shah and thus avoid millions of deaths. It also hinted at a desire to rebel against his father. The plain truth, it said, was that Genghis did not want this peace. He was a man who believed only in slaughter and, in Jochi's view, was mad, since what was the point of governing an empire if you had killed off all its inhabitants?[81]

Enraged by this filial treachery, Genghis became alarmed the more he pondered the implications of Jochi's posture. He was already known to be sulking in his tent like a latter-day Achilles because the succession had been given to Ogodei. The overwhelming probability was that when Genghis died, Jochi would raise the standard of revolt against Ogodei. The result would be civil war and the implosion of all that Genghis had spent his life working for.[82] As for the policy of pacific reconciliation with the conquered, that seemed to Genghis simply the rationalisation of a disappointed man and wholly unrealistic for, after all, to quote the words of a later worshipper of power, covenants without swords are but words.[83]

It was clear, then, that Jochi had to disappear from the scene before the khan himself did. Genghis therefore sent one of his secret assassination squads to his son's ulus. It is a moral certainty that Jochi died of poison, either late in 1226 or the first two months of 1227. Ironically, his other envoys crossed with the assassins and brought back word that Jochi's illness had been authentic, but by that time Genghis's fury had moved him on way beyond that (now) somewhat academic point.[84]

The year 1225 and the return to Mongolia also signalled the beginning of the final settling of accounts with the Tangut. Genghis had never forgotten for a single day the treachery of Hsi-Hsia in refusing to send troops for the Khwarezmian campaign and the insulting message that accompanied the refusal (see above, Chapter 10). According to the treaty of 1210 this was an ironclad condition of the peace.[85] With the death of Hsi-Hsia's ruler Li An-Ch'uan in 1211 and the accession in a coup of Shenzong, continuity and peaceful relations with the Mongols seemed assured, but the evil genius of general Asa Gambu, a virulent anti-Mongolist, soon wove its spell.[86] While continuing to profess friendship, Shenzong, by 1220 completely under the influence of Asa Gambu, made the refusal that so infuriated Genghis and began intriguing with the Jin for a military alliance. This backfired, with the result that Hsi-Hsia and Jin China were soon at war. Overconfident of their superiority, the Tangut menaced the north-western region of the Jin state and refused all peace offers. The Jin surprised them with a forced march and badly defeated them. To make matters worse, in 1221 Muqali took an army across Hsi-Hsia, plundering and looting as he went, alienating the locals with their savagery and rapine and the demands for levies of troops.[87] Shenzong's policy of simultaneous war with the Mongols and Jin became massively unpopular, and in 1223 he was forced from the throne and died the same year (some say in battle). The new emperor Hsien-Tsung, one of Asa Gambu's creatures, threw aside all his predecessor's ambiguous posturing, announced an alliance with the Jin and defied the Mongols.

Still on his way back from Khwarezmia, Genghis was not yet ready for full-scale war with the Tangut but sent an army from eastern Shanxi under the Tangut renegade Shih T'ien-hsiang to sack cities in the southern Ordos; this army was soon forced to retire by the appearance of a Jin host in its rear.[88] Uncomfortably aware that he had roused the sleeping giant to his west and north, Hsien-Tsung tried to conciliate the Mongols by a bizarre volte-face when, in January 1224, he sent an army to attack the Jin; this too was defeated. Finally, under pressure from Asa Gambu, he was forced to reveal his true colours, and began fomenting anti-Mongol feeling among the people of western Hsi-Hsia, encouraging them to raid across the border into Mongol territory.[89] Continuing the poor Tangut military showing, these forces too were heavily defeated by Mongol outposts, and this at a time when Genghis and his main army were absent and major operations (conducted by Bol) continued in northern China.

Genghis appointed Bol as his commander and sent him with a force of perhaps 20,000 men to attack key cities in eastern Hsi-Hsia. Nearing the town of Yin Chou, Bol collided with a far superior Tangut force, routed it and then took the town.[90] Genghis decided to recall Bol, in readiness for the all-out campaign he was planning, but left his army besieging Sha-chou. At this point Hsien-Tsung decided he had had enough and sued for peace. Genghis, his own preparations not quite complete, consented, provided the Tangut ruler sent one of his sons as hostage. This was agreed, the siege of Sha-chou was then lifted and the Mongols went home. But Asa Gambu was angry with Hsien-Tsung and his peace policy and insisted on yet another about-turn. Soon the Tangut were intriguing with the Jin once more for an anti-Mongol alliance.[91]

Genghis meanwhile assembled a huge army, maybe 70–80,000 strong on the banks of the Tula River in southern Mongolia (between the Selenga and Kerulen Rivers). For the khan the campaign against the Tangut was so important that he insisted on conducting it himself, despite his age and failing health. As his deputy commanders Genghis took Tolui, Ogodei and the great Subedei; Chagatai was left behind to govern Mongolia. This time, instead of Qulan, Genghis opted to take Yesui as his consort and bedmate.[92] Before departing on another major war of conquest, he took the unusual step of publishing his reasons for going to war with Hsi-Hsia. These were that the Tangut had broken faith by breaching the treaty of 1210 in which they promised to provide troops for the Mongols' future campaigns and by intriguing with the Jin for a military alliance.[93] Furthermore, he had halted Bol's campaign the year before on a Tangut pledge that their king would send one of his sons as a hostage and there was no sign of him. He was now giving them one last chance to send the hostage and make massive financial reparations for their other sins.[94]

Genghis did not really expect the Tangut to accept his terms and indeed he wanted war with them, both to avenge the previous 'insults' and because, if he was to complete the conquest of the Jin empire, he needed to have the Ordos, Shanxi and Gansu firmly in his grip so that the Tangut could not stab him in the back. But he hardly expected the virulence and contempt with which Hsien-Tsung and Asa Gambu rejected his overtures. Asa Gambu sent back a defiant message: fight or look for your 'reparations' among the Jin. Genghis exploded: 'Is it possible to go back now? I may die but I shall bring him to account. This I swear by the Everlasting Sky!'[95]

The issue of the hostage is one of those on which the sources (and modern scholars) are divided. The Tangut were adamant that they had sent the king's son, a lad of about five or six, but that the Mongols had murdered him, and had compounded the crime by leaving his body on the steppe for vultures to pick clean instead of burying him. To show their horror at the Mongol action and as a kind of ritual and symbolic act of substitution for the murdered son, the Tangut ostentatiously took under their protection the son of Quqluq, Genghis's old enemy, who had been petitioning without success for sanctuary in Hsi-Hsia since his father's death in 1218. The Mongols claimed that since no hostage had arrived at their camp, they now wanted both the promised king's son and the son of Quqluq.[96] It is hard to know what to make of all this. To kill an envoy or hostage was acknowledged among the Mongols as a heinous crime, and the atrocity would have been enhanced in the eyes of all Asia by the boy's tender years.[97] At one level, the entire story sounds like black propaganda by the Tangut. But it may be that Genghis, determined to destroy Hsi-Hsia and to give the Tangut no loophole for escape, engineered it so that no pacific resolution was possible.

Once the charges and countercharges had petered out in mutual acrimony, Genghis got his host under way. His first target was Qara Qoto on the other side of the Gobi. His strategy was to conquer western Hsi-Hsia and thus in effect cut the kingdom in half, before swinging east to assault the Tangut heartland in the Ordos loop, an area of 8,000 square miles; other forces would be deployed on the northern border of Hsi-Hsia to prevent the Jin from intervening. His ultimate aim was to devastate the irrigated areas of the realm, just as he had done in the Khwarezmian campaign. He knew that the Yellow River was Hsi-Hsia's vital artery and that within the Ordos loop the Tangut had created an irrigated area complete with canals of some two million acres, feeding a population of 3–4 million people. If he severed that lifeline, Hsien-Tsung and Asa Gambu would be finished.[98]

For his part Hsien-Tsung knew he was in a fight to the death, as he had been refused sanctuary in the Jin empire in the event of a defeat, but he was reasonably confident. His army was large, powerful and well equipped, while the Mongols, he hoped, would be worn out after their exertions against the Khwarezmian empire, heavily outnumbered when the Jin allies finally took a hand and also in danger from Song intervention – for he knew of the Song–Mongol clashes in China.[99]

But Genghis aimed to strike hard and fast before the Tangut's putative allies could mobilise. He considered it most unlikely that Asa Gambu would send his huge, unwieldy army across three hundred miles of desert to confront the Mongols in the west, so in the first part of the campaign he expected sieges rather than battles. In February 1226 he left the Tula River and struck due south for Qara Qoto. The Gobi posed no problems for the mounted cavalry, as the gravel, sand and clay provided a firm surface to ride on, and the Mongols knew the location of all the waterholes. As it was not yet summer, even the thin vegetation of July – artemisia, nitraria and dwarf iris – had not yet appeared and the only thing to break the monotony of the pale yellows and ochres, the duststorms and the deep red sunsets and dawns, were the intermittent caravans of nomads, or the occasional herd of antelope or wild horses.[100] By March they were at Qara Qoto and the Ejin River basin. Qara Qoto was an important stronghold in the extreme west of Hsi-Hsia, but it yielded easily.[101]

Moving farther south to where the upper Ejin bifurcated, the Mongols next struck at Su-chou (modern Jiuquan) and Kan-chou, confident that their sophisticated Chinese siege engineers and modern trebuchets would accomplish the job swiftly. But Su-chou held out for five weeks and Kan-chou a wholly unexpected five months.

At Su-chou there was huge loss of life. Genghis had set great store by the renegade Tangut commanders who were serving him, but when one of them, Hsi-li Chi'en-pu, promised he could deliver the city without bloodshed as his brother commanded the garrison there, Genghis was delighted. But the recalcitrant brother refused to surrender when the city fell, Genghis ordered everyone put to the sword, and it was with great difficulty that Hsi-li managed to secure the survival of his immediate family.[102] At Kan-chou another Tangut renegade in the khan's service, Chaghan, likewise tried to persuade his father and younger brother to come over to the Mongols, but this time the plan was aborted when the loyalist second-in-command in the city got wind of the scheme and executed them both. To compensate for this, and in appreciation of a service that went back nearly twenty years, Genghis spared 106 specially earmarked civilian families (for whom Chaghan had interceded) but massacred the garrison.

By this time the summer heat was upon the combatants, so Genghis wisely retreated to cooler summer quarters in the Qin-ling Mountains to the east.[103] He always became impatient, frustrated and angry when sieges dragged on in this way, so issued the first of his draconian decrees dealing with the Tangut; from now on if there was resistance, every living creature should be killed. The Tangut campaign soon turned into the nastiest, most vicious quasi-genocidal campaign yet waged by the Mongols.[104]

His armies took Ganzhou (modern Zhangye) in Gansu, a classic frontier town for much of China's history, the scene of many battles between Chinese and Hsiung-nu in the first two centuries AD, and later famous for Marco Polo's spending an entire year there.[105] Determined that there should be no let-up in which the Tangut could draw breath, Genghis switched his headquarters to the far north, involving a 300-mile journey to Uraqai (Wu-La-Hai) north of the Yellow River, a location well known to him since it had been captured by the Mongols in raids in 1207 and 1209. The most northerly Tangut stronghold, close to the Yellow River, probably along the outer loop of its northwestern bend, it was situated at the precise place where any Jin reinforcements might enter Hsi-Hsia.[106] He left Subedei to mop up in the west and south.

The ever-efficient Subedei soon defeated the recalcitrant Sa-li Uighur prince, a Tangut ally, and brought to heel all hostile tribes operating in the Nan Shan (Qilian) Mountains south of Su-chou and Kan-chou.[107] Next he proceeded up the valley of the River Tao, a tributary of the Yellow River on its right bank. The sources mention a number of towns and regions through which his armies marched: Ho-chou, Tao-chou (taken easily) and Min-chou, which put up such a frenzied resistance, lasting into 1227, that when it fell Subedei ordered every living thing destroyed; the military governor killed all his family and then committed suicide to escape the Mongols' wrath.[108] Subedei reported to Genghis that resistance in the west was no more, except for Min-chou and Sha-chou in the far west, both under siege and strategically unimportant.

This meant that the Mongols were now masters of the commercially important Gansu corridor, the narrow sliver of territory, part of the northern Silk Route, which ran north-west from the Yellow River along the northern edge of the Tibetan plateau, full of the oases that had just fallen to Subedei. The Tangut seemed to have no answer to the Mongols, and it gradually became clear that they had seriously exhausted their strength in the long wars with the Jin. Their only successes came from trickery, as when the Mongols were lured into an ambush at Sha-chou by a mendacious offer to surrender.[109]

Pursuing his policy of permanent mobility that had so often confounded his enemies, Genghis next ordered Subedei east from Gansu to the west of Shaanxi, taking in the arid areas of Ningxia en route.[110] Ogodei and Chaghan meanwhile were ordered to invade Jin territory along the valley of the River Wei and pin the Jin down in southern Shaanxi. As a further refinement he sent units over the Qin-ling Mountains to debouch into Song territory, swing north to the lower Yellow River and raid the Jin capital Kaifeng from the south. The Jin were so disconcerted by all this that they negotiated an armistice and promised to pay tribute pending the final outcome of the Mongol war with Hsi-Hsia.

By September 1226 Genghis was well rested, the heat had abated and he was ready to take personal charge of his armies once more. He struck east, made his way along the foot of the Nan Shan Mountains on the border between modern Qinghai and Gansu provinces, and crossed the Alashan Desert (which extends all the way from the Tibetan plateau northwards to the Gobi), passing sand dunes up to 900 feet in height and marvelling at the fauna that could survive in such an arid land, especially as temperatures fluctuated wildly both between seasons and from daytime to night-time; brown bear, snow leopards, wolves, wild asses, antelope and ibex were all reported by scouts. Genghis was in good heart, for the news came in that the Tangut's second city, Liang-zhou (modern Wuwei), a key place on the northern silk road at the junction of the Loess, Tibetan and Mongolian plateaux, had surrendered without a fight to avoid destruction.[112]

With most of the territory in the northern Ordos loop already in Mongol hands, Genghis was slowly closing the circle on the Tangut. He now approached the Yellow River itself and sent parties to reconnoitre the famous 'Nine Fords' so that he had an intimate knowledge of the mighty stream and all its quirks.[113] But on the left bank of the river he was embarrassed by the furious resistance of the town of Ying-li. This put up such a doughty fight that it was early December before Genghis was able to cross to the right bank to invest his primary target, Ling-chou, a fortress which guarded the approaches to the Tangut capital, little more than twenty miles away. Before assaulting Ling-chou, he took Yen Chu'an Chou with great slaughter and set up his headquarters there on 16 December.[114]

Suddenly word came in that the Tangut ruler Hsien-Tsung had died and been succeeded by the emperor Modi (a.k.a. Li Hsien). Genghis pondered the implications. It took him another two weeks to break down the defences of Ling-chou (which the Mongols called Dormegei) and this too was achieved only with great loss of life and with great difficulty, because the area around the fortress was striated by a complex system of irrigation canals; the Mongols used captives in the front line as usual.[115]

Modi proved far more energetic than his predecessor and by heroic efforts assembled a huge army; the chroniclers as usual leapt into the realms of fantasy and produced figures of anything between 100,000 and 500,000 men.[116] For all that it was clearly a formidable host. Now Genghis pulled off his last victory, and it was one of his most spectacular. Modi and his army advanced down the western bank of the Yellow River, presumably hoping to sever the Mongol lines of communication. By this time the river's flood plain was frozen and the overspill had turned the terrain around the banks into a frozen lake. Genghis ordered his army across this 'lake' and it was said that he sustained significant losses on the trek over it, but he caught the enemy unawares and inflicted a crushing defeat on them.[117]

So decisive was the victory that Genghis decided to leave the final stage, the siege of the Tangut capital, to subordinates while he went in search of the Jin. Such was his confidence that he divided his army into three: one to conduct the siege, another to block all approaches so that no reinforcements could arrive from any conceivable allies, whether Song or Jin, and the third to accompany him on another raid into Jin China. A combined operation with Subedei was devised, with the two armies operating at great distances from each other but always in touch via a relay of couriers. Subedei's raid netted a number of smaller towns but failed to budge the large cities. Genghis meanwhile struck east along the Wei valley, causing havoc and consternation along China's western frontier, but he was not strong enough to do more than score token victories. Then, feeling the summer heat once more approaching, he made his way back to the Liu-pan Mountains for the summer, reducing a few more Tangut strongholds as he went.[118]

The faithful Chaghan was put in charge of the siege of the Tangut capital, Chung-Hsing (modern Yinchuan) and the forces north of the city at Uraqai were also brought in to hasten its downfall. Modi made one last desperate attempt at breakout and managed to get away with a sizeable force, which he took across the Helan Mountains to Uraqai. Hearing of this, the troops at Uraqai made no attempt to intercept him in the mountains but waited until his tired soldiers came down the other side. Then they dealt with them bloodily, killed most of Modi's men and chased him back to his capital.[119] Even after this reverse Modi was at first defiant, rejecting every call for surrender the Mongols made. Gradually, though, he grew more despondent as more and more disasters, military and natural, piled up. Caught between the pincers of the Mongol army, the Tangut's hopes were very slender. Next the city was convulsed by an earthquake, then plague and pestilence broke out, spreading even to the Mongol attackers.[120] Finally, by July, food supplies started to run out. Modi realised the game was up and agreed to surrender, on condition that he was given a month with which to assemble suitable gifts when he made obeisance to his conqueror. He sent a pathetic message to Genghis, saying: 'I was afraid. Accept me as a son.'[121] Genghis was in no mood for mercy and, knowing he himself was near death, ordered his generals to kill emperor Modi and all his family when they came to surrender.

When the city finally admitted the Mongols, there was the usual sack and massacre. Asa Gambu was killed but Modi and family were held over at the khan's pleasure and not told of their ultimate fate. The victors made a point of systematically desecrating the royal tombs of Hsi-Hsia to destroy the reputation, status and credibility of the Tangut rulers.[123] Genghis had repeatedly called for thoroughgoing genocide, but there seems to have been a significant number of survivors. Some resettled in Sichuan, some found refuge in north-east India, and a considerable colony established itself along the Yalong River in eastern Tibet. Others found a refuge in Henan and Hebei in China where they continued to exist into the middle of the Ming dynasty.[124]

Since it is often claimed that Genghis's treatment of Hsi-Hsia amounted to genocide, it is worth asking why he did not persist with his oft-announced policy.[125] There can be many answers. Chaghan had already secured the safety of some Tangut oligarchs and was even more merciful to Chung-Hsing once Genghis was dead and the Mongol leadership had other concerns. Some say the typhus epidemic which ravaged both the attackers and the defenders led to a dissipation of the killing impulse. Others claim that Genghis himself waived his 'slaughter on sight' order when five constellations appeared in the night sky to the south-west and his soothsayers told him it was a bad omen.[126] Even without a deliberately murderous policy, however, the Mongols had ensured that Hsi-Hsia and the Tangut would never rise again.

The conquest of Hsi-Hsia was a remarkable feat – some claim it was Genghis's most brilliant campaign – and seems even more remarkable when one considers that he achieved it while very far from his physical best. Just before he set out across the Gobi, probably in January 1226, he held a great hunt, in the course of which he was badly thrown from his horse and may have suffered severe internal injuries. At all events, he never afterwards returned to full health.[127] Perhaps realising that the clock was ticking in earnest, sometime in the Tangut campaign, probably during one of his sojourns in the Liu-pan Mountains, he called a great quriltai to decide formally on the succession and the disposition of the empire after his death. Once again one can marvel at his confidence; deep in conflict with the Tangut, he was so sure of ultimate success that he felt able to turn to matters of imperial administration.

First, he confirmed the ulus system. The empire was to be divided between his four sons and their successors. Ogodei was to receive the Altai region and all the lands around the headwaters of the Ob, Irtysh and Yenisey Rivers stretching from Lakes Zaysan and Uvs into Siberia; as the youngest son Tolui was to inherit the Mongol heartland around the Selenga, Orkhon, Tula, Kerulen, Khalka and Onon Rivers together with Lake Baikal; Chagatai was to have Lake Balkhash, the Ili River valley and Transoxiana.[128] Potentially the richest ulus was given to Batu, son of Jochi – it is interesting that Genghis did not visit the 'sins' of the father on the son. His territory was to extend west from the Aral Sea 'as far as the hooves of Mongol horses can take him', which theoretically allowed him to establish a realm as far west as the Atlantic.[129]

Genghis gave each son and descendant just 4,000 families each as their quasi-feudal followers, which he calculated was not enough for any of them to set up as an independent power. Although the four subdivisons were never supposed to be independent khanates, that possibility was there from the beginning. From an administrative point of view, Genghis took the correct decision, as his empire was too vast and unwieldy for a strongly centralised ruler to control; but humanly and politically it was a very great mistake and, not surprisingly, it was precisely along the fault lines of the ulus settlement that the empire would eventually break up – and the problem was compounded by the Mongols' integration with other cultures instead of sticking with the traditional tribal ways.[130]

Next, Genghis formally confirmed, and the quriltai ratified, his earlier informal announcement of Ogodei as his heir. He was never convinced that any of his sons was a truly worthy successor, for a great khan needed military skill, tenacity, willpower, energy, deep knowledge of human nature and political genius. Each of his sons had some of his qualities: Jochi had had the generosity, liberality and imagination, Chagatai the stern, unbending ruthlessness and ability to go at once for the jugular, Tolui had great military talent, while Ogodei was shrewd, good natured, a good politician and a clever reader of human beings. There was no perfect choice, but Ogodei was the best option.[131]

At the quriltai Ogodei said he would do his father's will but was sceptical that his own sons had the ability to carry on the empire. Genghis replied that in that case, there would be no future hereditary rulers; all would be chosen on merit by a quriltai. But it could be argued that Genghis's touch deserted him at this stage. Basically there were four conflicting possibilities of succession in contention in Mongolia. There was lateral succession, where a younger brother inherited from an elder brother – this would have put Temuge in the driving seat. There was primogeniture, whereby Jochi or his heirs would have succeeded. In direct collision with this was the Mongol tradition of ultimogeniture, whereby the youngest son inherited the realm, which would have made Tolui the next khan. Finally, as a new and original kind of despotic ruler, Genghis could simply nominate the successor himself and establish this as the dynastic precedent.[132] It is worth pointing out that Genghis took none of these options and gave no clear guide for the future. He simply chose Ogodei as the most satisfactory lineal descendant, provided no satisfactory logical or 'philosophical' guide for the future, left it to future quriltais, whose composition and membership he did not discuss, and virtually guaranteed a future of factionalism and near-civil war. If ever there was a poisoned chalice, it was here.[133]

By the end of July 1227, with the surrender of Chung-Hsing all but negotiated and only the massacre of its population still to come, Genghis was laid up; he summoned his sons and most trusted generals and confidants to his bedside. Yesui and Tolui announced to the Mongols in general that the khan had a fever but the assembled elite knew he was near death. The military high command wanted to pull out of Hsi-Hsia temporarily as a mark of respect, but Genghis drew himself up in his bed and vehemently countermanded any such idea, on the (surely correct) grounds that it would give the Tangut new hope. To his sons he reiterated the arrangements about the succession and the division of the empire, remarking sadly: 'Life is short. I could not conquer all the world. You will have to do it.'[134]

Turning to religious affairs, he told the company he wanted his new capital, Karakorum, located not in the holy land of the Burqan Qaldun, which would emphasise Mongol parochialism, but in that of the Otuken-Yish Mountain near the Orkhon valley, to underline his divinely appointed status as ruler of the world, as a corollary of which anyone not submitting to the Mongols was a blasphemer and deserved to die.[135] On the theme of the punishment of the Tangut, he said he wanted his previous 'kill them all' order to be limited to the royal family, the Tangut elite and all military personnel; mass extermination might send the signal to the world that Genghis had some special animus against Buddhism (the Tangut were Buddhists) and he was keen to promote the image of the Mongols as religiously tolerant.[136]

Next, he gave Tolui and the generals his instructions for the final conquest of the Jin empire. It was clear to him, he said, that the Jin had their best troops in heavily fortified cities at the western entrance to Henan province, where they were protected by the Yellow River to the north and the Qin-ling Mountains to the south. The attack against the Jin should therefore be launched from the south, starting from the headwaters of the Tang River in Henan province. It was true that this was Song territory and the action might mean war with the Song but, if his strategy was followed, Kaifeng would already have fallen by the time the Song mobilised. And since their enemies the Jin would have been annihilated by that time, the Song might even shrug the whole thing off.[137]

His final instruction was a detailed prescription for the death of Modi and the Tangut royal family. The Tangut ruler was to be given an honorific title before he was executed, partly to assuage Buddhist hostility and partly because, according to Mongol belief, the 'virtue' and kudos of a defeated enemy could increases one's power in the afterlife; moreover, the executed person thus honoured will switch in the hereafter from being an enemy to being a protective genius or spirit. One of the motives for the original order for mass extermination, excessive even by Genghis's standards, was as an insurance policy; the more Tangut massacred, the more deferential escorts he would have in the next life.[138] When Modi and his family were brought to Genghis's camp, the khan was already dead, but they did not know this. A black farce was played out whereby the Tangut were supposedly not allowed into the imperial presence but had to stand outside the tent and speak through a kind of veiled grill.[139] Sentenced and condemned, they were then executed, reputedly by being chopped to pieces on a spit.

Needless to say, the death of a man already revered as the conqueror of the world caused a sensation and, since human nature requires that the demise of a great man can never come about for any normal or banal reason, the wildest rumours began to circulate. One said that he succumbed to the typhus epidemic that had been ravaging the Mongol army, but this had faded by August 1227 and the time lapse between the typhus's virulent phase and the khan's death effectively rules that out as a cause.[140] Others claimed that he died of malaria; Mongol shamans pointed to 'witchcraft' as the cause, while Friar Carpini, who visited the Mongol court in the 1240s, stated that he had been killed by lightning, making an unwarranted extrapolation from the Mongols' morbid fear of that phenomenon.[141] The Tangut were keen to claim the scalp of the great Mongol khan and declared that he died of septicaemia after an arrow wound in the leg; it has been convincingly demonstrated that this was a wilful mutation of an actual occasion when Genghis was wounded with an arrow – while campaigning against the Jin in 1212.[142]

The most blatant of the Tangut's consoling myths has it that Genghis took Kurbelzhin, wife of the Tangut ruler to bed, where she mortally wounded him in the genitals. Unfortunately for the myth makers, this is a direct copy of the (better-based) rumour that Attila the Hun was murdered in this way and that, to cover up the 'shame', the Huns gave out that he had expired after an unstoppable nosebleed.[143] In any case, the sources tell us that the Tangut queen was executed alongside her husband, and that the two of them arrived in Genghis's camp only after he had died. Not to be baulked, the operators of the rumour mill changed the story somewhat. In the revised version it was an unknown Tangut patriot and beauty who martyred herself, having placed a piece of glass or a steel blade in her vagina which ripped Genghis open, causing him to bleed to death; needless to say, the physiological details of this complex procedure are lacking.[144]

Yet when all the tall stories have been sifted, the overwhelming probability is that Genghis died from some delayed effects from his earlier fall from a horse. Severe falls and the resulting internal injuries are known to trigger carcinoma, and the deathbed scenes in the sources suggest a death by cancer. Certainty is impossible in this area. As the wise and scholarly Igor de Rachewiltz comments: 'The real cause of Cinggis' death is unknown, and was certainly unknown also to most people at the time (except of course to the *qan*'s inner circle) judging by the conflicting reports of our sources.'[145]

It is typical of the fog that surrounds many of the crucial incidents in Genghis's life that neither the sources nor subsequent scholars have been able to agree on the exact date of his death, with 16, 18, 25 and 28 August 1227 all being offered as candidates.[146] Even more controversy attends the sequel, for Genghis's burial place is likewise unknown. If Rashid can be believed, it seems clear that the Mongol elite disregarded the khan's last wishes, for it was said that one day, shortly before his death, he was out hunting and took a fancy to a lone tree somewhere in the Liu-pan Mountains, giving express instructions that this was to be his burial place.[147] Instead, the Mongols tried to take his body back to Mount Burqan in Mongolia. There is a very strong tradition that the corpse never reached Mongolia, that the burial party got bogged down in the Muna Mountains north of the Ordos and panicked, and that prayers were said to Heaven to allow the cortege to proceed, one of which has been preserved.[148]

The overwhelming probability is that Genghis was buried not in Mongolia but in or near the Ordos, as in the great heat of August decomposition of the body was setting in fast and the Mongols had no knowledge of embalming.[149] From the fact that no early thirteenth-century artefacts looted from the cities of Persia and China have survived, it is inferred that they were all buried with the khan. Probable rather than certain is the enduring legend that all fifty members of the burial party were taken to another location and then executed by an assassination squad, who in turn were then executed, so that the secret of the khan's final resting place would die with him. We cannot be certain that this happened on this occasion, but we do know this was Mongol practice after the burial of later khans.[150]

This grisly coda to Genghis's career was not quite the last slaughterous occasion with which his memory was 'honoured'. The Mongol elite preserved the fiction that the great khan was buried on Burqan Qaldun, declared it a prohibited zone and posted guards there. At Ogodei's accession, forty aristocratic virgins were sacrificed there to his father's spirit.[151] Genghis departed this life much as he had lived in it, in a tourbillion of death and bloodshed.

14

Ogodei

For nearly two years after the death of Genghis the Mongol empire was in limbo, with Tolui, the youngest son, acting as regent. It seems clear that a majority of the Mongol nobility wanted him as their next khan, chiefly because of his reputation as a great warrior. They faced the difficulty that Genghis had explicitly nominated his second surviving son Ogodei as his successor. To the conflicting claims of primogeniture, ultimogeniture (the traditional Mongol way) and lateral succession, the choice of the great khan himself became an additional element in the turgid political broth the Mongol nation would have to sup at the next great quriltai, to choose the new emperor. In theory the quriltai was an assembly that merely ratified by public acclamation choices that had already been hammered out in the thirteenth century's equivalent of 'smoke-filled rooms', but it seems that the succession issue was fought all the way to the great assembly in 1229.[1]

The delay was unconscionable as well as being politically inexpedient, since the Jin used the power vacuum to recover some of their position in China. The only plausible explanation is that Tolui was lobbying hard to be the next khan, but two factors work against this interpretation. First, Tolui was Genghis's favourite son, and he of all people would never have opposed his father's wishes. Secondly, Tolui loved and admired Ogodei – Juvaini indeed speaks of a fondness 'beyond the degree of brotherhood'[2] – and there was none of the hatred that disfigured the relationship between Chagatai and Jochi. Another reading of the years 1227–29 is that the Mongol aristocracy pressed very hard for Tolui and it took a long time to convince them that the wishes of Genghis were paramount.

One version of this story makes Genghis's close adviser and court astrologer Yelu Chu Cai the key figure in the drama, with Yelu arguing persuasively for a Chinese model of hierarchy: a khan of khans (khaghan) at the top, princes of the blood second, a wider imperial family third and a host of courtiers and nobles beneath it. This is usually considered a myth both because it overstates Yelu's influence and because Yelu could have spoken out thus only if he had been the official executor of Genghis's written will – but Genghis left no such will.[3]

Ogodei was reluctant to accept the succession and proceeded cautiously, even with his father's nomination and his brothers' written acceptance of him. Playing devil's advocate, he exhorted the Mongols to consider his brother's great qualities, stressed that Mongol tradition favoured Tolui and even brought Genghis's brothers and uncles into the picture.[4] The Mongol nobility were won round to Ogodei as the next khan – and he did indeed take the title of khaghan – because his succession was upheld in such a way as to foreshadow the eventual replacement of his line by Tolui's. He was elected khan on either 11 or 13 of September 1229.[5] The assembled oligarchs at the quriltai were bound by a mighty oath, whose wording was used to endorse future Mongol khans:

> So long as there exists a piece of flesh from the children of Ogodei Khan, and even if you roll it in grass and this grass the cow won't eat, and if you roll it in fat, and this fat the dog won't eat, yet we shall elect him to the khanate and nobody else will sit on the throne.[6]

For Genghis the critical consideration was that his conquests should continue and that there should be no struggle for power between his sons. Genghis was fortunate in having sons who carried his work forward; by contrast, the work of most of the great conquerors and rulers of history was undone by their lack of successors or by disastrous ones: Alexander the Great, Marcus Aurelius, Tamerlane, Napoleon, the list goes on and on.

Ogodei's elevation to supreme power was as unlikely as that of Richard the Lionheart, his near-contemporary, to the kingship of England, for both were third sons. What had cleared his path was the implacable enmity between the first and second sons, Jochi and Chagatai, which meant the choice of either would have plunged the Mongol empire into civil war. Jochi's devastating riposte when Chagatai taunted him with being a bastard and therefore unworthy of the succession was well known: 'only in point of stupidity are you perhaps superior.'[7] This deadly hatred was why Genghis announced ten years before his death that Ogodei was to succeed him – the command repeated on his deathbed. He also made it clear that Chagatai was out of the reckoning by not consulting him in his final days in August 1227, closeting himself only with Ogodei and Tolui to discuss the succession.[8]

Ogodei's first actions showed his strict obedience to his father's parting instructions. He granted an amnesty for all crimes and misdemeanours committed between Genghis's death and his own accession, while making it clear that thereafter he intended to be very tough and come down hard on corrupt administrators, defalcating governors and other forms of official corruption.[9] Crucially, he confirmed the system of appanages and the division of the empire into spheres of influence – the sensitive balance of power between his sons that Genghis had aimed at. Ogodei got all the territories in the far north: the Tarbaghatai Mountains, the Kara Irtysh valley and the region from the Altai Mountains to Lake Baikal. Tolui inherited his father's military forces and was lord of the Mongolian homeland, in accordance with Mongolian tradition.[10] Chagatai got the richest and most fertile lands: both the former Qara Khitai and parts of Transoxiana (but not Samarkand and Bukhara, which were administered directly from Ogodei's central chancellery).[11] Jochi had originally received the lands between the Urals and the Irtysh, including Khwarezmia proper, the Syr Darya and both sides of the Aral Sea. On his death his realm was further subdivided. Orda, his eldest son, received Syr Darya while Batu, the second son, received the north coast of the Caspian as far as the Ural River (and as we have seen, all the lands west of the Caspian 'as far as the hooves of Mongol horses can reach'); the third son, Shiban, received an area from the upper reaches of the Ural to the Irtysh, including the Tourgai and Irghiz Rivers.[12] North China, unconquered as yet but in Genghis's opinion surely doomed, had been earmarked initially for Genghis' brothers, with the proviso that it would eventually be divided among his grandchildren.[13]

Aged 43 when he ascended the throne, Ogodei (his name means 'uphill') was a physically huge man with a distinct liking for women. His two principal wives were Boraqchin and Toregene (sometimes known as Tura-Khinah) and he had two others (Moga and Jachin) as well as sixty concubines, one of whom, a particular favourite whose

name is not given in the sources, bore him two sons, Qadan and Malik. Moga had been previously a concubine of Genghis himself. Toregene, a Naiman previously married to a Merkit chieftain, was no beauty but intelligent, able, domineering, wilful and determined. She bore Ogodei five sons, including his successor Guyuk.[14]

Ogodei in person was a mixture of the wholly admirable and the despicable. Intelligent, shrewd, conscientious, tolerant, open-minded, usually calm, laid back, dignified, firm, reasonable, a master politician and conciliator, he could suddenly switch to a capricious mode of harsh and despotic cruelty, especially if he was in his cups, which happened nightly. The Persian historian Juzjani, who had an implacable hatred of him for reasons that are not entirely clear, called him 'a butcher and a tyrant'.[15] The *Secret History* is not much kinder, presenting him as a drunkard, womaniser and miser (the latter is certainly false), who fenced his hunting reserves in case any animals escaped onto his brothers' lands.

Taking the negative attributes first, on at least three occasions he behaved like the stereotypical oriental autocrat. We have already noted the ritual killing, immediately after his election as khan, of forty beautiful girls chosen from the best families, who were adorned in jewels and sumptuous raiment and then sacrificed on his father's grave along with the same number of horses – this despite there having already been two years of official mourning for Genghis.[16] On another occasion he had a senior Mongol named Doqolqu killed out of pure jealousy – he resented the way his father had elevated him as a favourite.[17] Yet his worst atrocity occurred when the Oyirad tribe opposed his will. In 1237 Ogodei decreed that all nubile women in the empire were to be married to husbands of his choosing. The Oyirad tried to pre-empt this by marrying off all virgins and spinsters to men in their own tribe. Foaming with rage at this thwarting of the imperial will, Ogodei ordered all 4,000 Oyirad young women, other than wives of long standing, to parade in front of him. He then had the most aristocratic of them gang-raped by his men in the sight of their fathers, brothers and husbands. After this the girls were divided into three categories. The most beautiful ones were kept for his own seraglio; those ranked of average looks were kept to service foreign diplomats and foreign dignitaries; the homely ones were distributed to men the Mongols considered 'low lifes': servants, falconers and animal keepers (for some reason keepers of leopards and cheetahs are particularly mentioned in the sources).[18]

On the credit side, Ogodei was both sentimental and excessively generous. Always open-handed, he was widely regarded as a 'soft touch', and his largesse often had his officials tearing their hair out. An old man asked for money to start a company, and Ogodei gave him the required funds without any form of security; when asked why, he shrugged and said the old man had not long to live. When someone else approached him with the begging bowl, his financial advisers tried to kill the request stone dead by pointing out that the man already had massive debts. Ogodei asked how much was the debt, then paid it off, in addition to giving the man the sum originally requested.[19] Seemingly indifferent to money, he allowed himself to be routinely swindled by profiteering merchants and entrepreneurs; he was expert at rationalising in his own mind money-making schemes that to any disinterested third party were obvious scams. He became irritated by the waste of troops needed to guard his treasury at Karakorum, ordered the guard removed and let it be known that anyone who needed money could enter the treasury and take it.[20]

Once, observing a craftsman of obvious incompetence vainly trying to sell his wares, he felt sorry for the man and bought his entire stock of files, awls and other tools. When he heard that his officials had deferred some of the payments he ordered out of his excessive and absurd generosity, on the grounds that the khan must have been drunk, he fell into a rage and threatened to execute them. With a weakness for anyone poor, in debt or who made a personal appeal to him, Ogodei was even munificent to people coming from nominally hostile countries, claiming that this was the way to disarm them and win them over, so that there would never be any appetite in their native land for making war on the Mongols.[21]

This sentimental generosity extended even to the animal kingdom. A wolf which had been killing sheep was brought into his presence prior to execution. Ogodei ordered the wolf released on condition it spoke to its fellow lupines and got them all to move away to another area. He then solemnly conjured the wolf to agree to this deal. On this occasion, his officials managed to hoodwink him, for as soon as the wolf was released they set the massive Mongolian hunting dogs on it and it was torn to pieces. Ogodei was so angry that his will had been thwarted that he ordered all the dogs killed.[22]

Some said Ogodei's excessive generosity came about because he was an inveterate gambler, with a particular relish for betting on his favourite sport, wrestling. He himself declared that the generous impulse was the only way to secure immortality. Having been told that the only proposition true in all circumstances is 'All this too will pass away', he decided that he could refute the dictum by gaining such a reputation that his fame would last forever. Others, more shrewdly, claimed that Ogodei despised the pure financial power of merchants and financiers who had never fought in battle, that he valued only political power and martial valour, and took his cavalier way with money simply to show his contempt for non-warriors.[23]

Usually a circumspect and wise ruler, Ogodei always took particular care to keep Chagatai loyal and satisfied, habitually consulting him on important matters and treating him with the utmost consideration. In response, Chagatai was almost exaggeratedly deferential and respectful to the great khan. On one occasion, when the two brothers were out riding, Chagatai challenged Ogodei to a race, which Chagatai's horse won. That night Chagatai reflected that it might have been *lèse-majesté* to act thus with his khan. Next morning he insisted on going before Ogodei to be punished. Ogodei was at first alarmed by the sudden appearance of Chagatai at his palace, thinking that he was staging a coup. When he heard of the purpose of the visit, he was massively reassuring and showered Chagatai with compliments. Nevertheless Chagatai, a stickler for etiquette, insisted that a proclamation be issued that the khaghan had spared his life and that, in compensation for his grievous error, Chagatai had given him nine fine horses. This overt show of support helped Ogodei, as it encouraged all those who had been lukewarm supporters of Ogodei's accession to accept that he really was the khan and that Chagatai would never challenge him.[24]

Nevertheless, there were occasions when Ogodei had to rap his brother over the knuckles. Once Chagatai assigned some provinces in Transoxiana that were under the direct rule of Ogodei's governor Yalavach to someone else. Yalavach complained to Ogodei, who ordered Chagatai to reverse his order. Chagatai complied immediately and sent an abject apology to the khan: 'I acted from ignorance and without guidance. I have no answer that I can write but since the khan has ordered me to reply I am emboldened to write this much.'[25] Ogodei was so pleased with the reply that he said Chagatai could have the disputed provinces anyway. In private Chagatai fumed at Yalavach's 'impertinence' and made it clear to the governor that he was seriously displeased. Yalavach, a highly talented individual with great powers of improvisation, saw at once that he needed to conciliate a dangerous enemy and enlisted the help of Chagatai's vizier Vazir, who ran the palace at Beshbaliq in the north that was Chagatai's pride and joy.[26] Vazir was a fascinating individual in his own right. A Khitan, he had come up the hard way, having been a herdsman for a Jalayir chief and then a servant to Chagatai's personal physician. Chagatai once said he wanted to learn everything possible about his father's life and achievements. Possessing an encyclopedic memory, Vazir conducted his own research through interviews, then made it known to Chagatai that he was the man to consult. At first put off by the physical appearance of the short and ugly Vazir, Chagatai soon grew to be astonished by the man's memory, intelligence, quick wit, eloquence and courage. He promoted him to vizier and allowed him extraordinary indulgence. Once at council Chagatai's wife intervened and Vazir, in Chagatai's presence, told her to shut up as she was just a woman. Chagatai did not reprimand him and later even allowed him to put his own daughter-in-law to death for adultery without consulting him, as he was supposed to. Here was the obvious man to help Yalavach to patch up his fractured relationship with Chagatai. Yalavach wrote to Vazir to say that he was just as influential with Ogodei as Vazir was with Chagatai; it followed that he could persuade Ogodei to put Vazir to death. By contrast, he could do him untold favours if Vazir could mend the breach with Chagatai. Vazir recognised a fellow *éminence grise* of supreme cunning and restored Yalavach to Chagatai's favour.[27]

The historian Juzjani's partiality for Chagatai is just as puzzling as his hostility to Ogodei. He calls Chagatai dignified, open-hearted, opulent of temperament, valiant and hospitable – no other chronicler or commentator was able to discern those qualities – and compares his 'noble' love of hunting favourably with Ogodei's 'banausic' mania for wrestling and gambling.[28] This partiality is all the more puzzling as Juzjani was a Muslim, and Chagatai's most marked characteristic was a hypertrophied hatred for Islam; Ogodei, by contrast, was spectactularly pro-Muslim.[29]

It will be recalled that the Mongols had certain strict taboos about water – no bathing or washing in streams in spring or summer; water scooped up in vessels of gold and silver was believed to cause thunderstorms, and so on – whereas Islam was equally strict about aspects of washing and hygiene. One day Ogodei and Chagatai came upon a Muslim washing in a stream during the forbidden season. Chagatai, as the keeper of the flame of the Yasa, wanted to kill the man on the spot but Ogodei spoke up: 'Let's consider the matter tomorrow.' He reserved judgement but took the Muslim in chains back to his headquarters. That night Ogodei had the prisoner brought to him and coached him in his responses for the morrow: he was to say that, conscious of his blasphemy, he had thrown his last coin into the water even though he was very poor. Next morning in Chagatai's presence the man repeated the story. Chagatai at once sent his men to search for the alleged coin and there in the stream, sure enough, was a silver coin, surreptitiously planted by Ogodei. The khan then used the 'discovery' as an excuse to wax eloquent on the evils of poverty. He not only pardoned the man who had blasphemed but gave him ten extra silver coins.[30]

On another occasion Ogodei pardoned a Muslim who killed a sheep by slitting its throat in the Muslim way instead of slaughtering it in the manner ordained in the Mongol Yasa.[31] He also rebuked a troop of strolling players for putting on a puppet show which burlesqued Islam and said that the satire must never be performed again.[32] Ogodei clearly had no great opinion of Genghis's legal code but dared not dismantle it. Not only would he have lost all credibility by outraging his father's memory, but such a flagrant action might well have precipitated a coup or civil war.

Chagatai might have been vaguely aware that Ogodei was condoning the Islamic practices of the Muslims he (Chagatai) so detested, and possibly this explains an otherwise absurd incident. Chagatai prevailed on a Buddhist priest to tell Ogodei that Genghis had appeared to him in a dream and said that Islam spelt doom and destruction for the Mongol empire, and therefore that all Muslims should be exterminated. Ogodei saw at once that this was pure intrigue brought about by Chagatai. He asked the priest what language Genghis spoke in and was told: Turkish. Ogodei smirked and asked the priest if he understood Mongolian. No, said the Buddhist. 'Then you are a charlatan,' said Ogodei, 'for Mongolian was the only language my father knew.' Ogodei announced that he would not punish the man as he was Chagatai's protégé but ordered him to return to his master with a message not to bear false witness against Islam.[33] According to Juzjani, Ogodei was being disingenuous when he said he would not punish the priest, for he later had one of his death squads abduct and execute him.

In the excessive regard Ogodei showed for Islam, he may not have been so much naturally pro-Muslim as circumspect. He remembered clearly the time Quqluq had ordered the Kashgar Muslims to convert en masse to either Buddhism or Christianity, as a result of which they deserted to Genghis in their thousands.[34]

Ogodei was an inspired choice as khan in one respect: he had inherited from Genghis a deep understanding of the dynamics of the Mongol empire, and realised that everlasting conquest was the only way to preserve the realm, given how many aspirations by greedy and power-hungry nobles had been aroused.[35] In some ways he marked an advance on his father. Genhis liked to eliminate his enemies patiently and systematically, one by one. Ogodei, knowing he could recruit troops in all corners of his huge empire, favoured simultaneous attacks on a number of fronts. Using Turks, Tangut, Khitans, Jurchens and Tajiks as well as renegade Alans, Cumans and Circassians he was able to campaign at one and the same time in China, Korea, Persia, Iraq, the western steppes, Russia and, eventually, eastern Europe.

The first target was western Iran, only partially conquered during Genghis's great defeat of the Khwarezmian empire. While Genghis was concentrating on the final destruction of Hsi-Hsia in 1225–27, his old enemy Jalal al-Din had reappeared, taking advantage of the chaotic state in which the Mongols had left the western regions of the shah's one-time empire. After being banished by the sultan of Delhi, Jalal had returned secretly to Iraq-Adjemi in 1224 and set about making himself the regional overlord.[36] He was recognised as the legitimate ruler by many Turkish governors. Basing himself initially at Isfahan, he tried first to overthrow the caliph of Baghdad, hoping to succeed where his father had failed, but was repulsed.[37] He then based himself at Hamadan and set out to take Tabriz. His capture of Azerbaijan's capital showed all his old ferocity. The atabeg Uzbeg of Tabriz had bought off the wrath of Jebe and Subedei in 1221 with a huge payment of tribute, but the tactic did not work with Jalal. Uzbeg fled the city, leaving the defence to his wife, who at once communicated to Jalal that she would surrender the city if he promised to marry her.[38]

Master of Tabriz and Azerbaijan by 1225, Jalal next turned his attention to the Georgians, posing as the champion of all Islamic states on the borders of the infidel kingdom. Almost eviscerated by Jebe and Subedei in 1221–22, the Georgians had revived sufficiently to be able to defeat the Cumans in 1223.[39] They were hobbled to an extent by queen Rusudan (1223–1245), sister and heiress of George IV, who badly affected the loyalty and morale of her subjects by her blatantly open affair with a Mameluke lover.[40] The Georgians had already battled neighbouring Muslim states in 1223–24 and come off worse; the advent of Jalal further tipped the balance and they once again emerged second best.[41] Jalal fought the Georgians almost constantly in 1225–28, but never concentrated wholly on them, taking time off to consolidate his gains in Khwarezmia and Azerbaijan.

His movements in 1225 were typical of his butterfly-like trajectory. He returned to Tabriz and occupied it peacefully after marrying the atabeg's wife.[42] In August 1225 he defeated the Georgians with great slaughter at Garni in Armenia – a victory he owed to betrayal and treachery among the Georgians, not to mention arrant stupidity. Jalal had sent a letter to queen Rusudan, demanding that she submit to him, but her advisers discounted the threat and sent back an insulting reply, reminding Jalal how badly beaten he had been by Genghis at the Indus. Advancing to meet him near Garni, the Georgian vanguard took up a very favourable position on high ground. As Jalal began to surround them, the vanguard commanders called up the expected reinforcements, but none came. The failure to support their gallant knights was purely due to the endemic feuds and factionalism among the Georgian nobility. The result was disaster. A heavily outnumbered Georgian army was pulverised, and barely a man in the vanguard escaped alive.[43]

Jalal continued his relentless drive into Georgia and took Tiflis on 9 March 1226 after ferocious combats in which 100,000 Georgians are said to have perished. The survivors were ordered to convert to Islam; when they refused they were massacred.[44] Jalal pressed on and in late 1226 began the siege of the cities of Ani and Kars (just inside modern Turkey). By now poised for a definitive conquest of Georgia, Jalal had to suspend operations when urgent business in Iran drew him eastwards.

There were two main problems. The southern province of Kirman had escaped devastation during the Mongol invasion of 1219–22, was prosperous and peaceful, and had been assigned to Jalal's lieutenant

Balaq Hajib, who ruled as governor. Secretly loathing Jalal, as so many of his 'comrades' did, Balaq contacted the Mongols to warn them of Jalal's spectacular revival, and declared his independence. Jalal tried to trick him into surrender but Balaq was wise to all his former overlord's treacherous and duplicitous ways, and did not take the bait.[45] Forced to accept for the moment the fait accompli of Kirman's independence, Jalal turned to the more serious problem of the loss of Isfahan. This had been given to his younger brother (some say half-brother) Ghiyath al-Din, who also hated Jalal; Ghiyath sent a secret message to the Mongols saying that he wished to defect to them.[46]

Now we come to one of the most mysterious episodes in Mongol history, which the sources do nothing to clear up. It seems that one of the Mongol commanders left behind in eastern Iran after the conquest of Khwarezmia went rogue and tried to turn himself into a local warlord.[47] Ghiyath sent his plea to him, thinking he was still in good standing with Genghis. Together they hatched a plot for the overthrow of Jalal, knowing he was always for battles, whatever the circumstances. The Mongol general drew up his forces to make it look as though they were outnumbered and easy pickings. Eager for glory, Jalal gave battle, only to have his flank turned when Ghiyath deserted him and went over to the Mongols.[48] Only with great difficulty did Jalal make his escape. But the victors underrated him. He always had the ability to raise new armies at great speed and this time was no exception; quickly gathering a fresh force, he struck back at the victors while they were still celebrating and routed them. He took four hundred prisoners and beheaded them, acting as axeman himself until he grew tired.[49]

Jalal had a 'complex' about the Mongols after his defeat by Genghis at the Indus, and now trumpeted his victory all over Asia. Ogodei, not yet confirmed as khan, was not prepared to allow Jalal this propaganda victory, and sent him an open letter, denying that he had defeated Mongols: 'These are not our followers. We banished them from our presence.'[50] Ghiyath fled westwards and found refuge with the Assassins. As previously mentioned, these were Nizari Ismailis who broke away from the Fatimid empire around 1080 and operated out of mountain fastnesses in north-west Iran, with their headquarters at Alamut. The legend was that their leader, the 'Old Man of the Mountains', controlled his followers by inducing hashish-inspired dreams of paradise – though this has been shown to be a Western myth. Nevertheless, the Nizari Ismailis, like the Japanese ninja, became adept as professional assassins, and had several notable scalps to their credit, including Crusader leaders.[51] Every government in the Middle East feared them, and Jalal was no exception. To demonstrate overt contempt for the Assassins (though critics said it was more like whistling in the dark), Jalal himself put out a contract for Ghiyath's assassination.[52]

Having restored his position in Iran and recaptured Isfahan, Jalal turned back to Georgia, where he discovered that two salient events had occurred in his absence. In February 1227 the Georgians took advantage of his problems in the east to retake Tiflis but soon abandoned it when a great conflagration swept over the city. The cause is disputed: some say the fire was pure accident, others that the Georgians, lacking the numbers to garrison it effectively, burnt the city down so as to deny its use to the enemy.[53]

The second development was more serious. Queen Rusudan had forged an alliance with the sultans of Rum and Ahlat, creating a powerful anti-Jalal bloc and boasting the name of the 'Caucasian Federation'. Once again Jalal used speed and cunning to prevail. First he formed his own alliance with the Cumans, to threaten Georgia from the north, then proposed a truce to the Confederation which he claimed would lead to a permanent treaty. Then he assembled an army and attacked the Georgians before they had linked up with their allies' forces. Even though the Georgians were led by their best general, Ivane Mkhargrdzeli, Jalal defeated them at the battle of Bolnisi (1228).[54] Then he moved against Rum and Ahlat. After systematically plundering Armenia in the winter of 1228–29, he moved on Ahlat on the north-western shore of Lake Van (eastern Turkey today) and besieged it. The siege dragged on from August 1229 to April 1230, and in the end was successful only through the treachery of one of the defending chieftains.[55] The pillaging and slaughter were as ferocious as anything the Mongols had done. Ibn al-Athir, always inclined to give more benefits of the doubt to Jalal than to the Mongols, was disgusted, commenting 'No wonder that God Almighty did not spare him for long.'[56]

The atrocities at Ahlat indeed marked Jalal's high-water mark. On paper he had gone a fair way towards restoring his father's empire, as he controlled Fars, Kirman, Iraq-Adjemi, Azerbaijan and Mazandaran, as well as being the hegemon in Armenia and Georgia. Yet this apparently favourable position masked a host of problems. The rapacity of his tax-collectors and the brutality of his licentious soldiery alienated many who had originally supported him; his men eventually achieved a more sordid reputation than the Mongols.[57] And it was gradually borne in on his counsellors and advisers that he was ultimately a very stupid man, needlessly cruel, heedless of consequences, an impatient short-termist with no political nous. Despite the pretence that he was fighting for 'Persian independence', it was very clear to all that he was a selfish adventurer and a glory-hunter. His worst fault was taking on a plethora of enemies simultaneously. By 1230 he had on his roster of foes not just the Georgians, Mongols, the Assassins, but also the caliph at Baghdad, the sultans of Rum and Damascus, the Ayyubids of Syria and the Seljuks of Turkey.[58] He refused to listen to any advice and snubbed his vizier when he suggested Fabian tactics against the sultanate of Rum: 'They are a flock of sheep,' he said contemptuously. 'Does the lion complain of the size of the flock?'[59] The selfsame vizier foolishly thought that Jalal had overreached himself as the siege of Ahlat dragged on and, when no news came in, concluded that he was free to do as he liked with his master's treasury and harem. After returning from Ahlat, Jalal threw the vizier into a dungeon, where he died.[60]

Meanwhile Jalal was becoming daily more unpopular with his own troops, who were scandalised by his homosexual love for a eunuch called Qilij; when the man died Jalal went almost berserk with grief, further disgusting his associates. For weeks he toted the corpse around with him, refusing to bury it and even offering it food and drink. His emirs became exasperated and muttered among themselves that he was mad.[61] In the circumstances Ibn al-Athir's judgement seems mild: 'Jalal-al-din was a bad ruler who administered his realm abominably.'[62]

The year 1230 saw Jalal's overdetermined downfall. The Seljuk Turks and the sultans of Rum and Damascus brought him to bay near Erzincan in August 1230 in a bloody three-day battle. Jalal fought well on the first day and came close to winning before the battle was interrupted by a sandstorm. In the end, though, Seljuk discipline, morale and efficiency won the day, and Jalal was overwhelmingly defeated, losing tens of thousands in casualties that this time he could not replace.[63] Almost simultaneously with this defeat, a huge Mongol army under a newly promoted general named Chormaqan moved west, obedient to Ogodei's urgent directive that he must defeat Jalal once and for all; a letter had even arrived from the Assassins to the Mongols (their future nemesis) urging joint action against this common menace.[64]

Chormaqan was one of the three 'quiver bearers' in the imperial guard who had spoken out in favour of the three Mongol princes when Genghis was angry with their performance at the siege of Gurganj (Urgench) (see Chapter 11). He had waited ten years for his first major command, and now his hour had struck. Chormaqan knew of Jalal's methods and his reliance on speed, so concluded he could outsmart him by moving with even greater velocity. Once across the Amu Darya and with intelligence from the Assassins on Jalal's whereabouts, he acted decisively. A blitzkrieg series of forced marches took Chormaqan through Khorasan to Rayy and thence to the outskirts of Tabriz, where he took the defenders completely by surprise. Other Mongol forces took Qom, Hamadan, Fars and Kirman.[65]

Jalal at once patched up a peace with the Seljuks and the Ayyubids, appealed in vain to the caliph for help against the Mongols, told both sides that he was their bulwark and without him they would not be able to resist the Mongols, and frantically rushed around trying to organise a defence against the invaders, only to realise that no one wanted to lift a finger to help him. There followed a chase, reminiscent of that of Subedei and Jebe in pursuit of his father ten years earlier, through the plains of Mugan and Arran to the region of Diyar Bakr, with Jalal losing more and more men all the time.[66] The Mongols took Maragha in Azerbaijan, routed Jalal's forces at Amid (Diyarbakir) and took a succession of towns: Amid itself, Tanza, Mardin, Nisibis (Nusaybin), Sinjar, Badlis (Bitlis), Khilat; Chormaqan himself wintered at Rayy.[67]

But Chormaqan was angry and impatient that his troops had not managed to catch Jalal. Accordingly, he sent out a fresh army in pursuit. The original Mongol force had withdrawn from outside Tabriz in its deviously circling search for Jalal, at which the foolish prince concluded the Mongols had retreated. He ordered a three-day banquet to celebrate. The Mongols came upon the reeling carousers at midnight on the first day; Jalal was comatose in a drunken sleep. His general Orkhan managed with great difficulty to arouse him and warn him of the imminent peril. Jalal begged Orkhan to buy him time while he got away, and Orkhan did so, raising aloft Jalal's standard to make the Mongols think he intended to go out in a blaze of glory. Confident that they had secured their quarry, Chormaqan's men closed in, whereupon Orkhan took a picked corps of men and fled. The Mongols pursued, cornered him and, once they realised they had been duped, slew every last man in their rage and frustration.[68]

But Jalal did not survive long. Near Amid, on his way to the land of the Kurds, he fell asleep, exhausted somewhere in the mountains. Kurdish bandits saw his campfire and came upon him. Not recognising him, they killed him and took his clothes and money.[69] Doubling back to Amid with their spoils, they were apprehended and executed when Jalal's distinctive clothes were recognised. That was not quite the end of the story, for a number of false Jalals arose over the next decade, trying to claim his patrimony.[70] But this particular thorn in the Mongols' side was no more, giving particular satisfaction to Chormaqan because of his unheroic death. Nonetheless one of his few admirers eulogised: 'It seems to have been preordained by Fate that this bravest of lions should be slain by foxes.'[71]

From 1231 to 1237 Chormaqan was busy bringing the whole of Persia under Mongol rule, subduing risings among the tribes of the Caucasus and generally enjoying his position as military governor of Iran, basing himself on the fertile plains of Mugan that he found so congenial. He appointed notable civil governors in Khorasan and Mazandaran, respectively a Qara Khitan named Chin Temur, who had a distinguished administrative career until his death in 1235, and a Nestorian Uighur recommended to him by Chinqai.[72] In 1231 Chormaqan's troops sacked Maragha on the eastern side of Lake Urmia and massacred the inhabitants because they had resisted. Ibn al-Athir relates that the Mongols laughed and mimicked prayers to Allah as they slaughtered. From Maragha too came another of those stories about one Mongol being able single-handedly to massacre dozens of people because they were so terrified they simply lay down and awaited the dolorous stroke.

The Mongols then moved against Erbil but withdrew when that city agreed to pay an annual tribute to Ogodei; Tabriz soon followed suit.[73] Amid, the target of the 1233 campaign, suffered as grievously as the cities of Khorasan and Transoxiana had in 1221–22. Chormaqan destroyed Ganja in Caucasia in 1236 and by 1237 had achieved the final and definitive conquest of the whole of Iran and Azerbaijan.[74] Though never with the rabid hatred of Chagatai, Chormaqan seemed permanently hostile to Islam and seemed to favour Christianity, except in the

cases of Georgia and Armenia.[75] The supremely astute king Hethum I of Cilicia (1226–1269) cleverly submitted to the Mongols very early on and made a point of stressing the congruent interests of Ogodei and Christianity, especially vis-à-vis Islam.

As for Chormaqan, he followed the traditional policy of religious tolerance laid down by Genghis – not so much out of open-mindedness per se as a cynical realisation that one could divide and rule by playing up religious differences.[76] It was not until late 1236 that he proceeded to his final objective: a definitive conquest of Georgia and Armenia, realms so resilient that they had already survived two defeats by Jebe and Subedei and three by Jalal. Chormaqan was under orders from Ogodei not to complete this task until the army of Batu was on the Bulgar steppes en route to the conquest of Russia, so as to seal off any Russian retreat into the Caucasus or any reinforcement from there.[77] He quickly overran Georgia, forcing queen Rusudan to flee. Before she did so, she left orders with her governor in Tiflis that on the approach of the Mongols he should burn the working-class quarters of the city but leave the palace and affluent suburbs intact; the man panicked and set fire to everything. The Mongols accepted the surrender of many feudal lords disillusioned with Rusudan but forced them to serve in their ranks.[78]

More ferocious than the easy conquest of Georgia was the campaign in Armenia which opened in 1239. The siege and sack of the cities of Ani and Kars were especially sanguinary affairs. But by 1240 Chormaqan was able to report to Ogodei that all Mongol objectives in Georgia and Armenia had been secured.[79] By a curious kind of pre-established harmony his health gave out in the very moment of final victory. In 1240 he mysteriously lost the power of speech and resigned; his wife Altan Khatun became the acting governor until a replacement arrived. Chormaqan died the following year, yet another in the seemingly unending roster of highly talented Mongol generals.[80]

An even more important campaign for Ogodei was the renewal of the war against the Jin, which had gone into limbo during the interregnum of 1227–29. The few engagements that had been fought had gone in the Jin's favour, including a victory (albeit in a minor battle) by the Jin general Wan-yen Ho-ta – the first ever triumph on a battlefield against the Mongols by a Jin commander – and another success by the Jin Ila Pu'a, who lifted the siege of Ching-yang in southern

Shaanxi and discomfited the Mongol commander Doqolqu.[81] The Jin emperor Ai-Tsung had tried to appease the Mongols by sending gifts to honour the shade of the departed Genghis, but Ogodei refused to accept them unless they were accompanied by a declaration of submission. When they sent envoys south with this message, Ai-Tsung had them killed, thus making a renewal of the war certain.[82]

The Jin were irrationally sanguine about their position, buoyed up as they were by the recovery of most of the Wei basin in central Shaanxi in 1227–30, including the key fortress of Tung-kuan just south of the junction of the Wei and Yellow Rivers, which commanded the entrances to Henan province, plus the fortress of Ho-Chung, north of the Yellow River in the south-west corner of Shaanxi.[83] Moreover, the current crop of Mongol generals in China seemed to have produced no one anywhere near the stature of Muqali; the limp effort by Mongol forces in these years also caused many former allies to desert and join the Jin or to waver in their allegiance.

Ogodei raised a huge army – said to be at least 100,000 strong[84] – and, with Tolui crossed into China. Ai-Tsung, swallowing whole the hyperbole from Ho-ta and Ila Pu'a that they were the conquerors of the Mongols, put them in charge of the resistance, much to their trepidation; they knew the reality of what they had won and what they were now likely to face.[85] They were right to be worried, for Ogodei's strategy was not to try to conquer fresh territories but to seek out and destroy the Jin armies. The Mongols began by marching through Shanxi and Shaanxi, extinguishing the Jin presence there and destroying sixty forts.[86] For a while they were bogged down in the siege of the strongly defended Fung-Chang-fu, where Aizong ordered the reluctant Ho-ta and Ila Pu'a to intercept them. The result was what the Chinese duo had feared; total defeat by a far superior enemy. Aizong sent out no more relief forces, and the Mongols proceeded with a methodical reduction of Fung-Chang-fu, cutting off all food supplies and interdicting all towns from which the beleaguered garrison could possibly be provisioned. Slowly throttled, Fung-Chang-fu surrendered.[87]

By May 1230 the Mongols had recovered all towns in the Wei basin lost in the 'phoney war' years of 1227–29. Ogodei confided to Tolui that 1231 would be the year they invaded Henan and forced the Jin to a definitive encounter. He planned to bamboozle them by retreating north while Tolui went south, following the strategy recommended by Genghis, which involved entering Song territory and then swinging in an arc to come at Kaifeng from the south.[88]

Ogodei's strategy involved the coordination of three separate Mongol armies: Tolui's force operating in Song territory, his own advancing south through Shanxi, and a third under Subedei (the left wing) also moving south along the Shanxi-Shandong border and protecting Ogodei's left flank.[89] Each of these operations calls for further analysis, but by far the most important part of the strategy was Tolui's high adventure. He was to approach the Jin capital at Kaifeng from the south-east, thus obviating the need for a long and difficult siege of Tung-kuan, the key fortress whose possession made the Jin confident and complacent.

In mid-1231 Ogodei sent envoys to get the Song to agree to free passage of Tolui's army across their territory, but a local Song commander killed them: a bizarre twist given that the Song had previously asked the Mongols for an anti-Jin alliance.[90] Ogodei sent another mission, demanding an explanation, and this one reached the Song capital. Not wishing for a war with the Mongols, the Song apologised for the atrocity committed by its commander but were non-committal on the subject of crossing their territory; nonetheless, they made it clear by winks and nods that they would not oppose Tolui.

He accordingly prepared for another of the famous Mongol long rides, taking with him as his principal aides Shigi Qutuqu and Doqolqu Cherbi, brother of Bo'orchu. With 30,000 horsemen Tolui made a wide flanking movement far to the west of Jin territory, violating Song sovereignty by his deep penetration into their territory. He crossed the upper Wei then ascended into the Qin-ling Mountains, where his men suffered terribly from frostbite and starvation.[91] He crossed the upper Han River, and, basing himself in the mountainous area between the upper Han and the Tao River, proceeded to take the Song city of Hang-chung with great slaughter.

The massacre was essentially the result of the Song mastery of maritime and riverine transport and Tolui's consequent frustration. After a 40-day siege, about 12,000 troops from the garrison escaped on rafts. To punish this Tolui killed all who were left behind, apart from some of the women and children whom he took into slavery.[92] He then struck even farther south, down the Chia-ling River. Deep in

Sichuan province, travelling over mountains and 'plains like oceans' his men could descry the distant peaks of Tibet. Then, in November 1231, having allegedly taken 140 towns and fortresses on his great ride, he began to angle north-east. In December he camped on the banks of the Han and, after a period for rest and recreation, crossed the river into Jin territory at the end of January 1232.[93]

His appearance in Henan caused a sensation in the Jin capital. The imperial councillors advocated a mass withdrawal of the population into fortified towns, arguing that the Mongols would be so exhausted after their epic ride that they would probably lay siege to just one or two of these. But Ai-Tsung took the view that his people had suffered too much already and could not be asked to do more. With great moral fibre, he ordered the muster of another army to defend the western and southern borders of Henan against the Mongols.[94]

Concerned about the depletion in his numbers after the rigours of his odyssey, Tolui decided to postpone a battlefield struggle with the Jin and elected for a war of attrition. He was influenced in this by the long talks he had previously held with Subedei, who was a great believer in wearing down 'soft' peoples like the Chinese in this way.[95] The Jin commander wanted to wait until Tolui attempted the crossing of the Yellow River before attacking him, but he was being pressed from Kaifeng for quick results. A scrappy engagement with Tolui's vanguard was meant to lure the Jin into an ambush, but they did not take the bait. Thinking himself safe, the Jin commander ordered his men to stand down, whereupon Tolui mounted a cleverly staged ambush in a wood and stole the enemy's baggage. To cover up this fiasco, the Jin reported that the earlier skirmish had been a great battle which they had won; the gullible Ai-Tsung was overjoyed.[96]

But in the field the Jin hankered after revenge for the latest humiliation. Goading them further with more ambushes and long-range archery blizzards, the Mongols retreated into the mountains where Tolui had prepared camps for his men in caves on the mountainside. Bit by bit they lured the Jin ever upwards, past the snowline. Unprepared for snow, the Jin lost large numbers of their men to cold and exposure.[97] The Mongols' victory, however, was pyrrhic. Both in this manoeuvre and in the earlier operations in Sichuan they had been desperately short of food, unable to live off the land and with game scarce in winter. Starvation threatened, avoided at times only by

cannibalism – one of the few clear and irrefutable instances of the practice in Mongol history.[98]

After dispersing his Jin pursuers, Tolui advanced again, to the great fortress of Tung-kuan near the junction of the Yellow and Wei Rivers. Anyone coming from the south had to go through a pass, which the Jin had blocked with a huge army. Heavily outnumbered, Tolui thought of evening the odds with yet another feigned retreat, and sent Shigi Qutuqu with the vanguard to try to tempt the enemy to pursuit; the tactic proved unavailing.[99] Tolui was thus in a quandary: retreat would seriously affect his men's morale as they had endured myriad hardships already; but an all-out attack on such strong defensive positions would be dangerous folly.

First he tried tempting the Jin by a semi-suicidal movement that involved Doqolqu Cherbi riding with just 1,000 men almost within arrow range, but the Jin reacted faster than he expected, and there was heavy loss of life as Doqolqu scrambled to withdraw.[100] Forced back onto the desperate expedient of magic, Tolui besought his Qangli sorcerers to come up with something. They suggested a rain magic ceremony carried out with stones. Amazingly, the hocus-pocus worked, a deluge came down, and Tolui ordered his men to don their heavy raingear. Screened by the stair-rod-like precipitation, Tolui's army passed across the front of the Jin army and on into a region where food and clothing was plentiful, much of it left behind by the peasantry fleeing from yet another war visited on them by their social 'betters'.[101]

For three days and nights Tolui's men rode on, with Tolui taking care to billet them in villages, 1,000 men apiece, to escape the pelting of the pitiless storm. Meanwhile the Jin army realised what had happened and set off in pursuit. Unfortunately for them, on the fourth day the heavy rain turned to snow, and they found themselves in the open, exposed to the full fury of the snow and ice; and in every village where they sought shelter, they found it destitute, the Mongols having swept the place clean.[102] For another three days the blizzard beat mercilessly on the Jin while the Mongols were comfortably ensconced in villages. On the fourth day, it was still snowing but Tolui judged his men well-fed and rested and in a high state of morale. He doubled back on his tracks and found the Jin huddled 'like a flock of sheep with their heads tucked into one another's tails'. The result was another massacre: the Mongols fell on the stricken Chinese and tore them apart like lions preying on antelopes. Some Jin remnants managed to get away in the heavy snowdrifts, but 5,000 lay dead in the white silence.[103]

Tolui's final exploit showed Mongol ingenuity at its best. They reached the Yellow River near modern Luoyang only to find it engorged with the recent heavy rains and floods. Fortunately, a huge quantity of large stones had been washed down to the river bank by the floods. Tolui set his men the Herculean task of taking these stones, wading into the river, building primitive breakwaters and diverting the mighty stream into a number of channels, which reduced its depth at the crucial crossing point. After a week of these labours, Tolui and his men rode across by their improvised causeway; it was allegedly the first time anyone had succeeded in fording the lower Yellow River.[104] The Mongols had solved the problem that had so long baffled the Jurchens, both before and after their incarnation as the Jin dynasty – how to get horses across deep rivers.[105]

Once on the other side, Tolui was able to send couriers to Ogodei to tell him of his whereabouts. Ogodei had been seriously worried about the fate of his beloved brother's risky expedition and was overjoyed at the news. He himself had advanced to the extreme south of Shanxi and then turned east along the Yellow River in the direction of Kaifeng. He was held up only by the siege of Ho-Chung, which took thirty-five days; it was taken eventually with the aid of a 200-foot tall pyramidal tower.[106] Angry that the civilian governor had held him up so long, Ogodei immediately executed him but was then further enraged to discover that the military commander and 3,000 troops had escaped in boats. The exploit did not help the Jin commander because when he reached safety, he was accused of cowardice and immediately beheaded.[107]

In some ways Subedei, commanding the third army, had the toughest assignment, as he faced the Jin's best general Wan-yen Yi, the man who had been responsible for most of the Jin successes in the Wei valley and Gansu in the 1227–29 interregnum. Early in 1231, before being assigned to Tolui, Doqolqu Cherbi had been defeated by Yi – a defeat he blamed on Subedei's not having supported him. Because Ogodei did not want to besmirch the reputation of a man who was the brother of Bo'orchu (who as Genghis's oldest comrade, had virtually been canonised in the Mongol pantheon), he accepted Doqolqu's transparent excuses and decided to pin the blame on Subedei, a man he had never cared for. Ogodei's dismissal of Doqolqu's defeat as a mere flea bite was a masterpiece of rationalisation:

> Since the reign of Genghis Khan we have fought many times with the army of Khitai [China] and always defeated them; and we have taken the greater part of their lands. Now that they have beaten us, it is a sign of their misfortune, a lamp which, at the time of going out, flares up and burns brightly and then goes out.[108]

When Subedei lost a minor engagement afterwards to Wan-yen Yi, Ogodei's judgement seemed confirmed.[109] Yet Subedei soon regained any lost face by a brilliant campaign in eastern Shanxi and western Liadong, helped in the latter location by the multiple defector Yen Shih. Always an enigma – curiously in Chinese communist historiography he is a leader of 'landlord forces' as against the 'Peasant force' of the Red Coats – Yen Shih was really nothing so elevated. Only by legerdemain can his origins be considered different from those of the Red Coat leaders while the man himself was the grossest opportunist or, as has been well said: 'like a chameleon, he not only changed colour as required to survive all vicissitudes, but actually came out better off each time.'[110]

This time Ogodei seemed pleased with Subedei and his acolytes. To their consternation the Jin suddenly realised that Tolui's army, on which they had concentrated their efforts, was not the main force after all, that if anything it was a feint, with the juggernauts of Ogodei and Subedei now coming into play. Somehow they scraped together an army, said to be 110,000 strong, under Wan-yen Yi. The three Mongol armies came together in euphoria near modern Yuzhou. They celebrated their triumph by an overwhelming victory over the Jin, in which Subedei managed to get between the Jin army and Kaifeng. Caught in a trap on an open plain, the Jin army of last resort was systematically destroyed. It was the last time a full-sized Jin army ever faced the Mongols on a battlefield.[111]

After the battle Wan-yen Yi was offered his life if he would enter Mongol service but he refused, saying his honour would not allow it. He made one last request: that he should be able to set eyes on the great Subedei. The veteran warrior, now in his fifties, was sought out and Wan-yen was presented to him. Busy supervising executions, Subedei listened, bored, while Wan-yen paid him a handsome compliment: it was not chance, but destiny, that produced great conquerors like him, said Wan-yen. Subedei, never a man known for his charm, seemed uninterested, and ordered him away to his own decapitation.[112]

The Jin were now in a desperate plight. After Tolui's campaign in the west, all hope of reinforcement from that area was gone. Even if their troops were not utterly demoralised, they could no longer fight the Mongols, as they possessed at most 20,000 horses.[113] The Mongols had blocked all avenues of escape. When Ai-Tsung finally realised that three separate Mongol armies were converging on him, he sent men to open the dykes on the Yellow River and flood the terrain round the city, but they found that the Mongols had anticipated this move and were already heavily entrenched on the dykes. Since all their troops had been hurriedly recalled to Kaifeng when the gravity of the crisis dawned, the emperor could hope for no relief and no reinforcement; indeed the great families who had remained in the truncated Jin empire after 1227 had by now migrated deep into the security of the Song realm.[114]

Only desperate remedies remained. One forlorn hope was that the Song might intervene. Ai-Tsung wrote to the Song court, pointing out what was indeed obvious, that once victorious, the Mongols would soon turn their attention south of the Yangtse. But the Song turned this appeal down mercilessly, even taunting the Jin about their supposed status as the Song's feudal superiors.[115] The only thing left to cling to was the possibility of disease striking the Mongols. The task of the besiegers was very difficult, for Kaifeng was a city of nearly one million inhabitants.[116] The people had clean water and febrifuges, which the Mongols did not, and it was well known that Henan province was a hotbed for plague, dysentery, cholera and, especially, smallpox.[117] Perhaps Nature would do what the Jin themselves could not. As the heat of the summer approached, Ogodei and Tolui withdrew to the north, leaving Subedei in charge of the final phase of the extinction of the Jin: the reduction of Kaifeng.[118]

If the Jin had actually wished that Fate would strike at the Mongols their prayers were answered though, unfortunately for them, it was not Subedei or the besiegers who succumbed, but the original architect of their doom, Tolui. Ogodei and Tolui were on their way back to the Mongolian border when the khan fell seriously ill and seemed to hover near death. His shamans 'explained' that he was possessed by water spirits and could not recover unless an expiatory subject presented himself as the substitute victim. Tolui, who loved Ogodei with a deep fraternal love, proposed himself as the victim; he then drank a bowl of water over which the shamans had pronounced incantations, fell sick shortly afterwards and died.

Thus, at least, the *Secret History*.[119] Juvaini tells a very different story - that Tolui, a notorious toper, overindulged in a massive drinking session, contracted alcoholic poisoning and died painfully after three days in agony, at the age of 40.[120] But there is a yet a third theory, powerfully advocated by some of the best scholars. This is that the endemic factionalism that would later destroy Genghis's united empire was already at work, and that an anti-Tolui cabal, possibly the descendants of Jochi, had him poisoned.[121] All the steppe nomads were especially adept at the secret administering of slow-acting poisons. They obtained venom from the Mongolian viper, particularly abundant in the Lake Baikal area, by squeezing it out of the snake's fangs onto a plate; the dried venom was then left for later use. The poison was usually prepared in autumn, as the viper's venom, varying in virulence with the seasons, was most dangerous in autumn.[122]

Whatever the reason for Tolui's death, Ogodei was devastated by it. He found it very hard to forget his beloved brother and whenever he was in his cups, would weep and lament over Tolui. To show his esteem for the departed one, he appointed Tolui's wife Sorqoqtani as senior administrative overlord of the empire, and from this power base she promoted her sons Mongke, Hulagu, Arik Boke and Qubilai (later the famous emperor of China).[123]

Subedei meanwhile tightened his grip on Kaifeng. Formal siege operations began there on 8 April 1232. The peace party inside the city put out feelers to the Mongols but on 24 July the war party stymied the approach by killing the Mongol ambassador and his entourage, who had arrived to discuss terms; that meant war to the knife, with no quarter. In any case, with Ogodei far away and Subedei on the spot, the chain of command was confused. Ogodei had originally proposed surrender terms, without the original sticking point that the emperor be stripped of his title, but specifying a financial indemnity, hostages from all leading Jin families and bevies of beautiful girls. Since he was allowed to keep his title, Ai-Tsung accepted with alacrity. Subedei, however, refused to relax his grip on the city: he said his orders from the khan were to take the city by siege and he had received no countermanding orders.[124] Ai-Tsung had already written to Ogodei to accept the peace terms and foolishly told his men not to fire on the Mongols in case that jeopardised his delicate negotiations. His troops were disillusioned by the order, and became even more so when Subedei made it clear he was not interested in peace; in the peace of his palace Ai-Tsung raged at Mongol duplicity.[125]

The Mongols pressed on with the siege. Their task was not easy, for Kaifeng had twelve supposedly impregnable towers defended by 60,000 troops (40,000 veterans of the garrison and 20,000 young 'national servicemen' drafted in to bear arms). Subedei countered by building ramparts to the height of the walls, using prisoners as the builders, so that they took the brunt of fatalities from the defenders' arrows. A sixteen-day bombardment with enormous loss of life failed to crack the Jin spirit, so Subedei ordered a cooling-off period while he considered his options. He was lucky, for he pulled the Mongol troops back just as an outbreak of plague swept over the city; for fifty days the pestilence raged, causing huge loss of life.[126] More and more Jin generals who had been lurking in the Chinese outback came forward to surrender, but spoiled their chance of survival by refusing to kneel before Subedei or images of Genghis. One of them, Cheng Ho-shong, said he could not kneel as he did not want anyone to say he had been treacherous to his emperor. The Mongols cut off his feet to punish him for the refusal to genuflect, then cut his mouth open to the ears. Courageous and defiant to the last, he won the admiration of his persecutors. One of the Mongol commanders said to him, 'Illustrious warrior, if ever you are reborn, make sure you are reborn as one of us.'[127]

Subedei resumed the siege in September 1232, using mangonels, trebuchets and gunpowder; this was said to be the first clear occasion in history when firearms were used in a major engagement. Flame-throwers and rockets were especially prominent during the siege. The Chinese had invented a 'fire lance'. Sixteen layers of strong yellow paper were pasted together and formed into a long pipe, which was then filled with a mixture of charcoal (made from willow wood), iron filings, powdered porcelain, sulphur and nitre; the pipe was then fitted to a lance. The soldiers handling the pipes carried a small iron box containing glowing embers with which they ignited the fire lances, which then spewed out a flame nine feet long.[128] The Mongols for their part fought back ferociously, using similar technology. They had catapults and mangonels and also a primitive cannon made of bamboo tubes which fired after being ignited by a slow-burning fuse.[129] The difference between the two sides was that whereas the Jin were constantly losing numbers through battle casualties and (especially) starvation, the Mongols preserved their numbers by using prisoners in the front ranks and sacrificing them without compunction.

They showed at Kaifeng how much they had learned about siege-craft in the twenty years since they started fighting the Jin. In addition to the 54-mile wall Subedei built right round the city to seal off all escape routes, he constantly experimented with new technology, using the skill and know-how of Muslim engineers recruited during and after the war with the shah. These engineers had constructed a trebuchet that hurled 166-pound projectiles with such force that they dented beaten clay walls to a depth of seven to eight feet.[130] They built mangonels with a range of 400 yards. Additionally, the Mongols had light catapults for use on a battlefield and a range of crude mortars and bombs. Whether the newest siege weapon, the counterweight trebuchet, was used at Kaifeng is disputed, but they were certainly commonplace in the later Mongol campaign against the Song.[131]

It seems that Subedei would sometimes permit a lull in the siege to enhance his men's morale and would allow some of his troops into the countryside for easy rapine. The sources speak of throngs of refugees, including children and old people, trying to escape to the mountains, being caught in snowdrifts and then being mercilessly massacred by these roving parties of Mongols.[132]

The long-drawn-out struggle for Kaifeng was extinguishing whatever residual humanity there was in the invaders, for increasingly there was a tendency to execute generals and commanders even if they surrendered. Incredibly, at this late stage, some Jin divisions were still at large and resisting. Within Kaifeng conditions were almost indescribably piteous, with all the phenomena associated with long sieges – famine, disease, cannibalism, civil murder – raised to a new power of horror. With heat in the summer fuelling disease and food desperately short, the Jin ate, first horseflesh, then the bones mixed with green weeds and finally a soup made of leather from saddles and military drums. The danger from plague was so great that Subedei often had to break off the siege and withdraw his own army for long periods, while never relaxing the blockade.133

The siege of Kaifeng was also an opportunity for the great and good in Mongol society to impress Ogodei with their deeds (real, imaginary, contrived, self-assigned or mendacious). Chinqai, the nearest Ogodei had to a chancellor or chief minister, was prominent, while Subedei, for once playing the politician, and knowing that he himself was not one of Ogodei's favourites, made a point of presenting him with a nine-dragon banner and the right to use a sedan chair.134 Inside Kaifeng all was desperation, and finally the emperor's nerve cracked. Leaving behind his empress and all members of the royal family, he slipped out of the city one night in February 1233 with a small escort, made his way through the Mongol lines and set off for Henan to raise a new army. Before he went he bribed his senior officers with lavish gratuities from the imperial treasury to persuade them to continue the fight until he could return with a relief force and appointed general Cui Li as his supreme commander.135

It seems that he very soon fell in with one of those roving Jin armies still at large and put himself at the head of it. Ai Tsong resolved to cross the Yellow River to attract more men to his banner but, searching for a ford, he was held up by a terrible storm. While stranded there, he was discovered by the Mongol force sent by Subedei in pursuit. The result of the ensuing battle was almost a foregone conclusion, but the loss of life was terrific, both in slaughterous fighting and by drowning after the battle when the Jin survivors tried to swim their way to safety. More than 8,000 corpses were counted, many of them washed up by the Yellow River.136 Ai-Tsung got away with some troops but any idea of rallying the countryside was ruled out when the defeated ones went on a rampage through the countryside, further diminishing support for the Jin regime. Soon reduced once more to his original entourage, Ai-Tsung sent a courier to summon his queen and princesses to join him. An exodus was planned but was unsuccessful, as by this time the Mongols had the city bottled up so tightly that it was said a flamingo would have had trouble escaping.

While all this was going on, Subedei had opened the second phase of his siege, once again assailing the city on all fronts.137 The plight of the Jin defenders was so desperate that it was reported some of the soldiers had eaten their wives and children and had destroyed their own houses to provide combustible material for the cannons and rockets. Particular demoralisation was caused by the news that Ai-Tsung had sent for his family, which was construed (rightly) as a tacit admission from him that there was no hope.138

Realising that he and everyone else in Kaifeng would be massacred if the dithering Ai-Tsung was allowed to continue negotiating with Subedei, general Cui Li staged a coup, executed the civilian governor and all high officials loyal to the emperor. The exiled Wan-yen Tsung-ko was proclaimed as the new regent and invited to return; he did so, was proclaimed regent and Cui Li became his prime minister. The new regime then asked Subedei for his latest surrender terms. Subedei seemed amenable to the overture and replied that all defences of the city must be demolished and a huge war indemnity paid.139 Cui Li, aware that his best chance of survival lay in being Subedei's creature, immediately sent a cache of jewels and a seraglio of beautiful girls to Subedei as an earnest of his good faith and instituted a reign of terror to force the wealthy of Kaifeng to disgorge their treasure. He then arrested the entire royal family and sent them under guard to Subedei, who at once put to death all the princes of the blood; the princesses were sent to Karakorum and were brutally treated en route.140

After this Subedei made his triumphal entry into Kaifeng, where he was greeted deferentially by Cui Li. His troops then went on the rampage, looting, pillaging and raping in defiance of the pledges Subdudei had given to Cui Li. Subedei always hated the Chinese and considered them subhuman, and this breach of an undertaking was his cynical way of showing his contempt.141

But he was baulked of his ultimate prey. He sent an express letter to Ogodei to tell him that Kaifeng was his and asked permission to sack the city, arguing that the high loss of Mongol life during the siege made this a fitting punishment. Yelu Chu Cai, then at the height of his influence with Ogodei, made a dramatic intervention, pleading for the lives of the Chinese and arguing that what Subedei proposed was mindless: Kaifeng had surrendered, its inhabitants were now Ogodei's subjects and, if he killed them, he would simply lose tens of thousands of taxpayers, to say nothing of a host of artisans and other skilled people who would be swept away in the holocaust of blood Subedei proposed. Ogodei listened, was convinced, and sent an urgent message to Subedei that only members of the royal family were to be killed.[142]

Five hundred members of the extended dynasty (especially the dominant Wan-yen clan) tasted the headman's axe. Cui Li now expected to be rewarded but was assassinated, not by an imperial loyalist angry at his treachery but by a Jin officer whose wife he had allegedly raped.[143] Subedei was furious at the implicit rebuke from Ogodei but knew well enough what would happen if he disobeyed, so simply moved on to his next target, the city of Caizhou, where Ai-Tsung had taken refuge in August 1233.

By this time Ai-Tsung was beside himself with frustration and rage. He could think of nothing better to do than execute all those generals who had failed or betrayed him (i.e. been defeated by the Mongols). He still clung to the outside hope that the Song, finally alarmed at the advent of the new Mongol superpower on their doorstep, would intervene on his side. But so far from doing this, the Song signed a treaty of alliance with the Mongols, which provided 20,000 troops for the attack on Caizhou and huge stores of grain to provision the Mongol army.[144] Together the allies advanced on Caizhou, which finally fell on 9 February 1234. For some time it had been obvious that the city was doomed but Ai-Tsung's generals dared not tell him the truth – either because the emperor still had a powerful bodyguard who could seize them and execute them or, more likely, because they had run out of options and feared the truth would induce an imperial heart attack; they left the useless Ai-Tsung in dalliance in his harem and simply tried to do their best in an impossible situation.

Finally alerted to reality by the weeping of his wives and concubines, Ai-Tsung learned of the danger and tried to escape by fleeing along a canal, only to find that the Mongols had securely blocked all exits.[145] Returning to the city, he saw the first flames leaping up and licking over the suburbs. Knowing the end was near, he hanged himself rather than face an ignominious captivity or worse. At first Subedei did not believe he was dead but was finally convinced when the Jin leaders dug up his body and brought his severed head before him.[146]

So perished the last Jin emperor and with him the entire Jurchen Jin dynasty which had lasted just short of one hundred and twenty years. The Jin had fought bitterly and courageously for twenty-three years and had provided the Mongols with their toughest military task to date. But the Mongols themselves had shown their calibre. As one historian has written, 'No steppe power had ever fought so tenaciously against a dynasty so firmly entrenched and capable of self-defence.'[147]

Almost inevitably, the victorious allies soon fell out. In gratitude for Song assistance, Ogodei allowed them to retain a foothold in south-east Henan, but the Song emperor immediately became greedy for more and attacked the Mongols, even managing to occupy Kaifeng and Luoyang briefly in July–August 1234 before being driven out.[148] At the great quriltai of 1235 Ogodei announced a huge campaign of conquest against the Song. At first this was a brilliant success. Three armies converged on the Song, one under Ogodei's son Koden, another under another son, Kochu and a third led by Chaghan.

When the Mongols pulled out of Henan in 1234, the Song foolishly thought they dared not face their own mighty armies. In fact they had withdrawn because of a great famine. Invading in force, the Song blundered into Henan only to find themselves starving; in their weakened state they were no match for the Mongols when they counterattacked and were driven out of Henan with heavy losses.[149] The Mongol armies reached Huangzhou (near modern Wuhan on the Yangtse) but were unable to hold on to their gains. By 1239 the war had petered out because Ogodei's attention was elsewhere. The pre-civil war situation in Mongolia in the 1240s precluded serious campaigning in the Song empire and it was not until 1279, after a further twenty years of constant campaigning, that emperor Qubilai was able to rule over a united China.[150]

Alongside the titanic Mongol efforts in China and Iran, Ogodei finally brought the troublesome Koreans to heel. It will be remembered that when Muqali died in 1223, Korea used the occasion to try to throw off the Mongol yoke. Busy with other, more important, concerns, Genghis paid little attention to events on the far side of the Yalu. Not even the murder of his envoys in 1224 – officially by bandits, who however were really Korean troops in disguise – stirred him to send a fresh expedition. Simultaneously, the revolt in Manchuria by Pu-hsien Wan-nu was allowed to dribble on until 1233.

Korea was not able to take full advantage of Genghis's distraction elsewhere, for in 1223, the very year of Muqali's death, its coasts began to be ravaged by large-scale raids from Japanese freebooters, who had been inactive for the previous hundred years. The devastation wrought by these pirates severely taxed the power of the Korean state and led it in turn to be distracted from the Mongol problem.[151] However, on Ogodei's accession he ordered a full conquest of Korea, with a large army sent to the peninsula under the general Sartaq (not to be confused with the more famous Sartaq, son of Batu).

In 1231 the Mongols swept into Korea, laying waste the land mercilessly, killing all males over the age of ten, and distributing the women and children as slaves among the soldiers; their onslaught caused further trouble for the Korean elite by triggering a slave rebellion.[152] The Koreans were used to the Mongols' deadly archery but were taken aback by the new weapons since perfected, including a new kind of flame-thrower in which fat was used to make the belched flame rage inextinguishably.[153] The reign of terror was spread from Pyongyang to Kaesong. King Gojong of Korea fled to the island of Ganghwa west of Seoul and remained there for the next thirty years. Meanwhile huge reparation payments were agreed to persuade the Mongols to withdraw: the tribute included a vast amount of gold, silver and pearls, otter pelts, 20,000 horses and hostages as surety for future good behaviour by the Koreans.[154] The Mongols then trekked back across the Yalu into Manchuria to deal with the rebels there, leaving behind governors and political commissars to make sure Ogodei's writ ran. But Sartaq suddenly died, and this seems to have encouraged a revival of the resistance movement. Guerrilla bands arose, the Mongol officials in post were killed, and a ferocious anti-Mongol propaganda campaign was set in motion by Buddhist monks.[155] Further instability was caused by the annual withdrawal of the small Mongol army of occupation, on which the commissars could theoretically call for help, for the winter hunt in Manchuria.[156]

Angered by the inability of his subordinates to subjugate Korea properly, at the great quriltai of 1235 Ogodei announced a new expedition to pacify Korea once and for all. A large army was prepared, under the command of the Tangut general Baghatur, with the Korean traitor Hong Bok-won as his second-in-command; they were instructed to destroy all vestiges of opposition but not to waste time or resources on a seaborne assault on the island of Ganghwa. The Mongols crossed the Yalu and rolled up the Koreans in a devastating campaign in spring 1236 which took them south of the Han River via Anju and Kaeju.

The Koreans switched to guerrilla warfare, but in response the Mongols instituted full-scale genocide.[157] Every time the country seemed finally tamed, there would be a fresh guerrilla outbreak, triggering a fresh Mongol atrocity in response. Finally, from his eyrie on Ganghwa king Gojong decided he could bear the sufferings of his people no more. In 1238 he signed a binding truce and sent a team of negotiators to Ogodei's new capital at Karakorum to agree a permanent treaty. Although the Mongols demanded his personal presence at Karakorum he refused, but satisfied face and Mongol honour by sending all his closest relatives as hostages.

Peace came finally in 1241, but the fearful Gojong spent the rest of his life on his island. Nonetheless, in Korea the Mongols gained useful experience of amphibious operations, which they would later use in their conquest of the Song. When Gojong died in 1259 after a reign of some 46 years, they moved in on the island and demolished all walls and fortifications. Korea was then annexed by Qubilai Khan, though the Koryo dynasty limped on till 1392.[158]

But by the end of his reign Ogodei could truthfully say that he had completed his father's work and now ruled an empire from the Pacific to the Caspian. Only one small piece in the transasiatic jigsaw puzzle remained: Tibet. Genghis himself had often expressed interest in this mysterious mountainous realm, and Ogodei inherited this trait. He sent two expeditions into Tibet, the first in 1236 under Koden and another in 1240 – this one was said to have caused great devastation.[159] The proper conquest was finally achieved under Mongke's khanate in the 1250s.

One story – disputed by some scholars – is that Genghis's grandson met Sa-pan, the abbot of the Sa-skya sect of Tibetan Buddhism to urge peaceful submission to the Mongols. Sa-pan agreed that this was a wise course and sent a 'pastoral letter' to the various spiritual and secular leaders in the country recommending this. In return, Qubilai Khan made the Sa-skya sect the most favoured religion in Tibet.[160]

The result of all these endeavours – in Tibet, Korea, China and Iran – was that Ogodei succeeded brilliantly in completing his father's work in warfare and foreign relations. Yet in many ways the peacetime tasks he faced proved more onerous and more difficult.